

Glebe-St. James United Church

Welcome Back Sunday (Season of Creation 1) Sept. 13, 2026

Please note: the livestream camera only captures the chairs at the front of the church. Sitting in the pews or at the back will keep you off camera. During the theme conversation, only the backs of children's heads are shown. – The Worship Team

Gathered by God

Preparing Our Hearts for Worship

Toccata

Douglas E. Wagner

Welcome

Ruth Burnett-Cole

In the name of the Holy Mystery,
who is Wholly Love,
we welcome you to Creator's House.
Thanks be to God!

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in downtown Ottawa on Sunday, September 6th.

My name is Ruth Burnett-Cole and I am one of the Licensed Lay Worship Leaders.

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time visitor or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, you are welcome and we hope you feel at home.

We are an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada - a place of faith, love and community. We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel loved and supported.

This means you are welcome here just as you are: no explanations, no needing to change yourself. **You** are welcome here – with all the complexities of who you

are and where you've been. **You** are a beloved child of God and we thank you for joining us today.

Announcements

Pulpit Exchange – Next week, on September 20th, Rev. Dr. Bob Fillier of Parkdale United Church will be leading worship at Glebe-St. James. Rev. Teresa will be at Parkdale!

Patchwork Pilgrimage Retreat – The women's retreat will be happening at Gracefield Christian Retreat from September 25-27th.

Men & Friends' – will be having their Potluck Dinner on September 30th, 5:30pm

Lunch & Learn with Tom Sherwood – will be happening on October 4th at 12 Noon, following worship. More information to follow.

Jeff Bird plays Hildegard von Bingen – Mark this concert in your calendar for October 24th. This ethereal performance is not to be missed.

Land Acknowledgement

Wendy Bergeron

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude that this place of worship sits on unceded, unsundered Algonquin Anishinaabe territory. We honour their history and strive to learn from their legacy of deep connection to the land, the water, and all the creatures that share Turtle Island with us.

I have made a personal commitment to learn more about Algonquin culture and world views and about Indigenous spirituality and I recently had a wonderful opportunity to do just that. At the end of August, I attended a workshop centered on a film by Kitigan Zibi Elder and Knowledge Keeper Albert Dumont. The film, entitled "Forest Light, Forest Wisdom", explores the deep cultural and spiritual significance of the forest to the Algonquin people and aims to bring traditional Indigenous ways of knowing to the public.

I was deeply touched by Elder Dumont's teachings and hope that he can bring his workshop to Glebe-St. James so we can continue our community's learning

journey on our path to reconciliation. I am in conversation with the organizers and will keep you all posted.

Candle Lighting Our Tears, Falling Down Like Rain

TLUS 89

Our tears, falling down like rain to the ground
will water seeds of change.
Kyrie, kyrie, kyrie, kyrie, kyrie eleison.

Call to Worship

Welcome back, friends.
Welcome back to this place,
to this community,
to the work of worship and wonder.

We are glad to be here.
We are glad to be together.

We gather in a world that is beautiful and fragile—
a world of forests and fields,
rivers and oceans,
birds and pollinators,
sunlight, soil, and rain.

We give thanks for the gift of creation.

We gather knowing that the choices we make each day
shape the world we share.

Hymn God of the Bible

MV 28

**1. God of the Bible, God in the Gospel,
hope seen in Jesus, hope yet to come,
you are our centre, daylight or darkness,
freedom or prison, you are our home.**

Refrain: (repeat 2 times)

**Fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise,
God always faithful, you do not change.**

- 2. God in our struggles, God in our hunger,
suffering with us, taking our part,
still you empow'r us, mothering Spirit,
feeding, sustaining, from your own heart.**
- 3. Those without status, those who are nothing,
you have made royal, gifted with rights,
chosen as partners, midwives of justice,
birthing new systems, lighting new lights.**
- 4. Not by your finger, not by your anger
will our world order change in a day,
but by your people, fearless and faithful,
small paper lanterns, lighting the way.**
- 5. Hope we must carry, shining and certain
through all our turmoil, terror and loss,
bonding us gladly one to the other,
till our world changes facing the Cross.**

Opening Prayer

God of creation,
God of every beginning and every return,
we give you thanks for bringing us back together.

After the slower rhythms of summer,
after travel and gardens and time outdoors,
after the ordinary joys and challenges of our lives,
we gather again as a community of faith.

Welcome us, God,
and help us welcome one another.

Open our hearts to the beauty of your creation—
to the trees and waters,
the birds and insects,
the soil beneath our feet,
and the air we breathe.

As we begin this Season of Creation,
help us see the world around us not as something we own,
but as a gift in which we participate.

Give us courage to notice what is being harmed,
wisdom to recognize what we can change,
and hope to believe that our choices matter.

Remind us that we are not powerless.

We are your people,
called to love one another
and to care for the Earth we share.

Be with us in our worship today.

May our songs, our prayers, our silence, and our listening
open us to your Spirit
and prepare us to live differently.

Prayer for Healing

Gracious God, you have entrusted us with a beautiful and abundant world,
yet we know that we have not always treated it as a gift.

We have taken more than we need.

We have wasted what others lack.

We have ignored the consequences of our choices.

We have sometimes chosen convenience over care.

And sometimes, God,
we have responded to the enormity of the climate crisis
by convincing ourselves that there is nothing we can do.

We have often said, “It won't make a difference.”

**Forgive us when despair becomes an excuse for inaction.
Forgive us when we forget that our daily choices matter—
that what we buy, what we use,
what we waste, what we protect,
and what we support all shape the world we share.**

Forgive us, too, when we expect others to change
while resisting change ourselves.
Give us the humility to acknowledge our part,
the courage to make different choices,
and the wisdom to know that we do not have to be perfect
to begin again.

**Free us from guilt that leaves us helpless,
and lead us toward responsibility that gives us hope.
We ask this in the spirit of Jesus,
who reminds us that grace is not simply something we receive,
but something that changes how we live. Amen.**

Assurance of God's Love

Family of Faith, hear this good news:

God's grace is greater than our failures.

We are not defined by the mistakes we have made,
nor are we trapped by the choices of yesterday.

The God who continually renews creation
also offers us the possibility of renewal.

We are forgiven.

And forgiveness is not permission to remain unchanged.

It is freedom to begin again.

So let us receive God's grace,
not as an escape from responsibility,
but as the courage to live differently.

May we go forward trusting
that change is possible,
that healing can begin,
and that even our small acts of love
can become part of something much larger.

Thanks be to God.

Sign of Peace

Hymn May the Peace of God Be Your Peace

MV 222

**May the peace of God be your peace.
May the love of God be the love you show.
May the joy of God be the joy you know,
and may the world that God would see be found in you.**

Listening for Wisdom

Theme Conversation Welcome Back Sunday

Good morning, friends!
Look at all of you!
Do you know what today is?
Welcome Back Sunday!
That means we are especially happy to see you here.

Maybe you went somewhere special this summer.
Maybe you visited your grandparents.
Maybe you played outside.
Maybe you went swimming.
Or maybe you stayed home and played with your toys.
Whatever you did, we're really glad you're back!

I want us to practice something together.

When I say “**Welcome!**”, I want you to open your arms really wide like this.

WELCOME! *(Children open their arms.)*

And when I say “**Back!**”, give yourself a big hug.

BACK! *(Children hug themselves.)*

Let's try it together.

WELCOME! *Arms wide.*

BACK! *Big hug.*

Wonderful!

Now let's think about something else that welcomes us every day.

What do you think welcomes us when we go outside?

The **Earth!**

The trees welcome us.

The flowers welcome us.

The birds welcome us.

The sunshine welcomes us.

And the water welcomes us.

The Earth is our home.

And God has given us this beautiful home to share.

So today I want us to think about one little thing

we can do to take care of our home.

Maybe we can put garbage in the garbage can.

Maybe we can turn off the water when we're finished washing our hands.

Maybe we can help water a plant.

Maybe we can be gentle with a bug instead of squishing it.

Maybe we can pick up a piece of litter when we see one.

Those are little things.

But little things matter.

A “creation” action

Let's pretend we're planting a little seed.

Everyone put your hands together like you're holding a tiny seed.

A tiny seed!

Now put it down in the ground.

Pat, pat, pat.

Give it some water.

Pretend to pour water.

And now we need sunshine!

Reach your hands way up high.

Stretch!

And slowly, slowly, slowly...

let your little plant grow!

Higher...

higher...

higher!

Now open your hands like a flower!

Beautiful!

And what happens when we take care of something?

It can grow!

People grow.

Flowers grow.

Trees grow.

And when we take care of God's creation, we help it grow too.

Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for welcoming us back.

Thank you for our families and friends.

Thank you for trees, flowers, birds, water, sunshine,
and all the beautiful world you have given us.

Help us take care of our Earth.

Help us remember that even little things can make a difference.

And help us remember to welcome one another with love. Amen.

Hymn Little by Little (*Verses 1 and 2*)

TLUS 134

Little by little by little.

Little by little by little.

**Little by little by little I know,
The tiniest seed will grow.**

**Watered by peace and justice,
watered by peace and justice,
watered by peace and justice:
tools to change our world.
Little by little by little.
Little by little by little.
Little by little by little I know,
The tiniest seed will grow.**

Prayer for Wisdom

Be with us, Loving Spirit,
inspire our hearts as we lean into Scripture,
that we might understand
in a new and fresh way,
your Word of Life. Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 18:21-35

Donna-Fay Mailhot

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, and, as he could not pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I

will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

This is wisdom from the gospel of Matthew.

Gift of Music Psalm 103

Robert C. Clatterbuck

Reflection The Debt We Cannot Repay

Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole

There is something wonderful about coming back.

Coming back to church after the summer.

Coming back to familiar faces.

Coming back to music and coffee and conversation.

Coming back to the rhythms of community.

Welcome back.

And today we are also beginning the **Season of Creation**—a time when Christians around the world are invited to pay particular attention to our relationship with the Earth and to the God who calls creation good.

At first, Matthew's Gospel seems to take us in a completely different direction.

Peter asks Jesus about forgiveness.

“Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”

And Jesus answers, “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Then Jesus tells a story about debt.

A servant owes the king an enormous amount of money. An impossible amount.
A debt he could never repay.

And the king does something extraordinary.
He forgives the debt.

The servant walks away free.

But then he encounters another servant who owes **him** a relatively small amount.

And suddenly the mercy disappears.

He grabs the other servant and demands payment.

“Pay what you owe.”

The contrast is the heart of the parable.

The first servant has received mercy beyond measure, but he behaves as though nothing has happened.

He has been forgiven, but he has not been changed by forgiveness.

He has received grace, but he refuses to extend grace.

He has been given a new possibility,
but he continues living according to the old rules.

And I think that is where this parable speaks surprisingly powerfully to the Season of Creation.

Because we, too, have been given something we could never repay.

Creation itself.

Think about what has been given to us.

The air we breathe.

The water we drink.

The soil that grows our food.

The forests that shelter countless forms of life.

The oceans.

The pollinators.
The birdsong in the morning.
The changing seasons.
The extraordinary complexity of life.
And our own lives.

None of us created these things.
None of us earned them.
We inherited them.
We received them as gifts.

And yet, like the servant in Jesus' parable,
we can begin to behave as though the gift places no obligation upon us.
We can consume without thinking.
Waste without noticing.
Pollute without considering who will live with the consequences.
Use the Earth's resources as though there will always be more.

And then, when we hear about climate change, we can say:
“What can I possibly do? The problem is too big.”

But notice what happens in Jesus' parable.
The servant's problem is not that he has been given too little.
His problem is that he has failed to understand what he has been given.
He has received forgiveness on a scale he cannot comprehend—and then he goes back to living as though he owes nothing to anyone.

That is the spiritual danger of our ecological crisis.
We can receive the gifts of creation every moment of every day
and still imagine that our choices are somehow neutral.
But they aren't.

Our choices are not neutral.

Every day, we participate in the world we are creating.
When we consume, we participate in systems of production.

When we travel, we participate in systems of energy and transportation.
When we throw something away, we participate in a system of waste.
When we protect a habitat, plant a native species, conserve energy, reduce consumption, support public policy, or advocate for environmental justice, we participate in restoration.

We are always participating.
The question is not whether we participate.
The question is **what we are participating in.**

And that is where Peter's question about forgiveness becomes particularly interesting.

Peter wants a number.

Seven times?

How many times do I have to do this?

What is the minimum?

When can I stop?

And Jesus refuses the arithmetic.

Because grace isn't about finding the minimum amount of goodness required.
It is about allowing what we have received to transform the way we live.
And perhaps we sometimes approach creation in exactly the opposite way.

What is the minimum I have to do?

Do I have to recycle this?

Do I have to change that?

Does one flight really matter?

Does one car really matter?

Does one meal really matter?

Does one congregation really matter?

And the answer is: **one choice will not solve climate change.**

But that is the wrong question.

The question is not whether one choice will save the planet.

The question is whether our choices reveal that we understand the gift we have received.

The servant in the parable could not repay his debt.
Neither can we repay the gift of creation.

We cannot manufacture the Earth from scratch.
We cannot recreate the millions of years of evolution that produced the life around us.
We cannot personally repair every damaged ecosystem.
We cannot individually reverse climate change.

But we can respond to a gift.
We can live differently because we have received it.
And this is why an attitude of ecological fatalism concerns me.
Because sometimes we say, “Nothing I do will make a difference,”
as though that were simply a statement of fact.
But it can become something more dangerous.
It can become a judgment against our own capacity—
and against the capacity of our fellow human beings—to change.

Think of the servant.
Imagine if, when the king offered forgiveness, the servant had said:
“Well, there is really no point in changing how I behave. My debt was enormous.

The system is too complicated. One act of mercy isn't going to fix everything.”
That would be absurd.

The gift itself creates a new possibility.
And that is what we are being invited to see.
Human beings **can** change.
We have changed before.
We have restored polluted rivers.
Protected forests.
Brought endangered species back from the edge.
Changed technologies.
Changed laws.
Changed cultural habits.

Built new forms of transportation and energy.
Created movements that once seemed impossible.

Not perfectly.
Not quickly enough.
But change is possible.
So when we say, “Nothing can be done,” we are not simply being realistic.
Sometimes we are giving up on one of the great gifts God has placed within
humanity:
the capacity to choose.

And that is why our everyday choices matter.
Not because we are individually responsible for everything.
We are not.

Climate change is also a political, economic, technological, and corporate
problem. We need governments, institutions, businesses, and communities to
make significant changes.
But we are not spectators.
We are participants.

And every day we have opportunities to participate differently.
We can choose restoration over destruction.
Care over indifference.
Enough over endless consumption.
Hope over fatalism.
Community over isolation.
And perhaps most importantly, we can choose to act together.

Which brings us back to **Welcome Back Sunday**.
Because the gift of church is that we don't have to make these choices alone.
Peter comes to Jesus with his question, but Jesus gives him a community and a
new way of seeing.
And the parable is not ultimately about money.
It is about **relationships**.

The servant thinks only in terms of what is owed to him.
Jesus invites us into a different economy—
an economy of mercy, generosity, gratitude, and mutual responsibility.
And that has everything to do with creation.

Because ecological responsibility is ultimately about relationships.
Our relationship with God.
Our relationship with one another.
Our relationship with future generations.
And our relationship with the living world around us.

The question is not simply, “How much can I take?”

It is:

“What kind of relationship do I want to have with the world that sustains me?”

So perhaps the first week of the Season of Creation gives us a very simple spiritual practice.

Notice the gifts.

Notice the air.

Notice the water.

Notice the trees.

Notice the food on your table.

Notice the living things that surround you.

And then ask:

Because I have received all this, how shall I live?

That is the question Jesus puts before Peter.

And perhaps it is the question creation puts before us.

We cannot repay the debt.

We cannot earn the gift.

But we can respond to it.

And our response matters.

So welcome back.

Welcome back to this community.

Welcome back to worship.

Welcome back to one another.

And welcome back to the work of caring for this extraordinary gift we have been given.

May we resist the temptation to say, "It is too big. It is too late. Nothing I do matters."

May we instead remember:

We have choices.

And our choices are not neutral.

Every day, in ways large and small,
we participate in either the destruction or the restoration of creation.

So let us receive the gift.

Let the gift change us.

And then, together, let us choose life.

Amen.

Responding in Thanksgiving

Hymn Deep In Our Hearts

MV 154

- 1. Deep in our hearts there is a common vision;
deep in our hearts there is a common song;
deep in our hearts there is a common story,
telling Creation that we are one.**
- 2. Deep in our hearts there is a common purpose;
deep in our hearts there is a common goal;
deep in our hearts there is a sacred message,
justice and peace in harmony.**

**3. Deep in our hearts there is a common longing;
deep in our hearts there is a common theme;
deep in our hearts there is a common current,
flowing to freedom like a stream.**

**4. Deep in our hearts there is a common vision;
deep in our hearts there is a common song;
deep in our hearts there is a common story,
telling Creation that we are one.**

Invitation to Give

One of the ways we demonstrate our courage in responding is through our collection. To say we are a community that supports flourishing life, means we must create space in our community for difference, for healing, for generosity. The ushers may now come forward to collect our tithes and offerings. Thank you.

Offering Hymn Who Will Speak A Word of Warning (*Verse 1*)

TLUS 130

**Who will speak a word of warning to a world whose wealth expands,
as the growing wealth is gathered into ever fewer hands?
Christ, you speak a word of warning for the church to know and tell:
greed is death and life is giving; hands that give receive as well.**

Offering Prayer

Generous God,

everything we have is gift.

The food on our tables,
the water we drink,
the air we breathe,
the homes in which we live,
the people who love us,
and this beautiful Earth we share.

Today we return a portion of what we have received.

May these offerings support the work of this congregation
and strengthen our ministry in the world.

Use what we give
to feed those who are hungry,
to welcome those who are seeking community,
to care for those who are vulnerable,
and to nurture the healing of your creation.

And remind us that our offering is more than money.

Our time is an offering.
Our attention is an offering.
Our choices are an offering.
Our voices are an offering.
Our willingness to change is an offering.

May all that we give—
and all that we do—
become part of your work of love, justice, and restoration. Amen.

Prayers of the People Give Peace to Ev'ry Heart

MV 86

Give peace to ev'ry heart.
Give peace to ev'ry heart.
Give peace, God. Give peace, God.

Prayer of Jesus

Our Mother and 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.**

Sent by the Spirit

Hymn Draw the Circle Wide

MV 145

Refrain:

**Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
standing side by side, draw the circle wide.**

- 1. God the still point of the circle,
'round whom all creation turns;
nothing lost, but held forever,
in God's gracious arms.**
- 2. Let our hearts touch far horizons,
so encompass great and small;
let our loving know no borders,
faithful to God's call.**

Refrain:

**Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
standing side by side, draw the circle wide.**

- 3. Let the dreams we dream be larger,
than we've ever dreamed before;
let the dream of Christ be in us,
open every door.**

Sending Forth

God of creation,
we have gathered here, and now you send us out.

Send us back into our homes, our workplaces,
our schools, our neighbourhoods,
and the places where our lives unfold.

Send us with open eyes to notice the world around us.
Send us with open hearts to care about the lives
of people and creatures we may never meet.

Send us with courage to make choices that nurture rather than destroy.
When we are tempted to think, "It won't make a difference,"
remind us that we are never acting alone.

Our choices join with the choices of others.
Our voices join with the voices of others.
Our small acts of care become part of a larger movement
toward healing and hope.
Give us courage to act, wisdom to choose,
patience when change is slow,
and hope when the challenges seem overwhelming.

And as we return to our ordinary lives,
may we remember the extraordinary gift we have received:
this Earth, this community,
this moment, this life.
May we receive these gifts with gratitude
and respond with love.

And as we go from this place
not as people who believe we can save the world by ourselves,
but as people who trust that, together,
we can help make the world more whole.
Go with us, God of creation, as we sing:

Sung Amen

VU 968

Music for the Journey

Come Thou Font of Every Blessing {Nettleton}

John Wyeth, arr. Joel Raney

End of Worship | Beginning of Service

Welcome to Glebe-St. James United Church.
Thank you for joining with us for our morning worship.

Please join us in Fraser Hall, following the service
for a time of fellowship and refreshments.

Musical Acknowledgements

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