

The Glebe-St. James United Church

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

February 8, 2026

Gathered by God

PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

Blessed Jesus, We are Here
Be Still and Know

WELCOME

Maya Li Evans

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, January 25th.

My name is Maya and I am ...

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time guest or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, we hope you feel at home. This is a place of faith, love, and community. Glebe-St. James is an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada. We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel loved and supported. Thank you for being here.

Friends, note who is seated near you, introduce yourself and invite them to join us for a time of fellowship in Fraser Hall after the service. We also encourage everyone to wear a name tag – they are available at the entrances to the church. Our newer members have told us how important it is to feeling welcome to get to know each other by name. And as I get older, I find it useful for those “senior moments” when I can't recall the names of the people I already know!

If you are new to Glebe-St. James and want more information, just fill out one of the green cards that are available near the entrances, place it on the offering plate or give it to one of the greeters and they will pass it into the office.

Today's worship service bulletin can be found on the GSJ website, along with a link to this week's announcements and a "donate" button to make your offering. If you are here in person,

you can share your offering in the service, either in the collection plate, by e-transfer or through our website – the QR code, found on the back of the pews, will take you to the website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This is a busy community, and lots is going on. I will just highlight a few announcements, but you will find a more complete list on our website and scrolling on the screens here in the sanctuary before and after our service.

It's a new year and we need volunteers.

Our leadership team seeks thoughtful people who want to contribute to the future of this church. If you are interested, please connect with Pam Fitch at coffee hour. We also need coffee hosts, welcome readers, scripture readers and people to offer land acknowledgements during our services. If you have never tried any of these jobs but think you might like to help, talk with Pam or Liz Elton or check out the volunteering section on the website. And if you are concerned that you won't know what to do, we will make sure you get support and mentoring from our more experienced members.

Shrove Tuesday, February 18th we will be serving pancakes starting at 5:30.
Our Ash Wednesday service will happen on the Tuesday following the pancakes
Queer Space will happen on February 25th so as not to conflict with the dinner.

Our Annual Congregational Meeting will happen on Sunday, March 1st.

And now, let's acknowledge the land on which our sanctuary stands.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Teresa Burnett-Cole

Winter is a time for storytelling. We tell our sacred stories in churches and in longhouses. We remember our past in order to dream of our futures. We name that, for millennia past, the Anishinsaabe Algonquin have shared story and song in this place and tended to the care of the Creator's lands. We remember the past, thank all of the ancestors, and have hopes for our tomorrow together.

LIGHTING OF CHRIST CANDLE

The season of Epiphany started with the Magi from a distant land following the star to the child Jesus. They were the first sign that Jesus was a gift for everyone.

May we continue to seek Christ's enlightening spirit in the company of all people.
We gather in the light of Christ.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love.

Come let us pray beautiful words.

Come let us live a loving life.

Come let us learn a new way to be.

Come let us worship our God!

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God,

We turn to your light as a beacon of hope in troubling times.

We ask that you guide us along the way

So that we may find the road ahead a little

easier to bear. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

HYMN Christ is Made the Sure Foundation

VU 325

1. **Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and cornerstone,
chosen of the Lord, and precious,
binding all the church in one,
holy Zion's help for ever,
and its confidence alone.**
2. **To this temple where we call you,
come, O Lord of hosts, today;
with your faithful loving-kindness
hear your servants as they pray,
and your fullest benediction
shed within its walls alway.**
3. **Here bestow on all your servants
what they ask of you to gain,
what they gain from you for ever
with the blessed to retain,
and hereafter in your glory
evermore with you to reign.**

- 4. Laud and honour to the Father,
laud and honour to the Son,
laud and honour to the Spirit,
ever three and ever one,
one in might, and one in glory,
while unending ages run.**

CALL TO HEALING

Friends, every day we are given choices –
the choice to be a friend, to be an ally, to extend a welcoming hand.
Some days we choose wisely, but from time to time, we inevitably get it wrong.

That is one of the many reasons we need the Prayer for Healing.
In this moment of prayer, we can practice the art of forgiving ourselves and others,
and being forgiven by one greater than ourselves.
So, join me in this transformative moment.
Join me in receiving grace. Let us pray.

PRAYER FOR HEALING

**God, Original Dreamer, over and over again in scripture,
we receive your dream for a beautiful world.
We consider your dream for peace and justice.
We ponder your dream for harmony and togetherness.
We welcome your dream for community and hope.
We receive your dreams, and yet do not always
open our spirits to those dreams.
We continue to live with curtains drawn,
The covers pulled tight, minds shut to the realities of this world.
Forgive us. Kindle a hope in us
that will burn through the depths of night.
Give us the strength and the will to let go
of our daytime ways of being and
sink into the rich darkness of this time of year,
where hope waits for us.
Then let us wake to discover the possibilities
and promise of a world made new, beginning with us.
With hope we pray. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE

Pay attention! There is good news! God loves you very much, and no matter what, God has dreams for you, for all of us. God will not let us sink into our nightmares without comfort. God holds us when our dreams turn into nightmares. God comforts and challenges. God gently touches our shoulder and encourages, "Wake up, wake up. Rise to meet the dawn." Jesus came into this world to wake us up, inviting us to be people of hope and justice in the world. That's the dream. So let's dream, and wake, and dream again, until our lives and the life of the world are made whole. In the meantime, let's live in active hope.

SIGN OF PEACE

One of the ways we are recognized as followers of the Way of Christ,
is by the light and love we share with one another.
It is in remembering this light and love that I say to you:

Friends, the peace of Christ be with you!
And also with you.

HYMN 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 illumines the pathway home**

Listening for Wisdom

THEME CONVERSATION

NOMINATION MOMENT

Pam Fitch

PRAYER FOR INSIGHT

Breathe on us, Breath of God, and enlighten us with understanding.
May these words take root and grow within our spirits. Amen.

GOSPEL Matthew 5:13-20

Ruth Burnett-Cole

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is God’s wisdom from our ancestors in faith.

GIFT OF MUSIC

“Lord, I Stretch My Hands to You”

Jay Althouse

Lord, I stretch my hands to you;
No other help I know.
If you should leave me all alone,
Where, then, shall I go?
Oh, Lord.
Lord, I give my soul to you;
I seek your care and love.
No other blessings do I need
But those from you above.
Lord, I ask you: Give me faith
And help me understand.
And Lord, when I this life shall leave,
Just hold me in your hand.
Lord, I stretch my hands to you;
No other help I know.
If You should leave me all alone,
Where, then, shall I go?
Oh, Lord, I stretch my hands to You.

Have you ever messed up the salt in a recipe? Whether you're cooking or baking, you know how it goes: Everything is perfectly measured, weighed, balanced. The timing is right; the technique solid.

And then you take that final taste and it's...off. It's either too salty—the mouth-puckering physical reaction of salt on the tongue, followed quickly by the emotional reaction of a ruined dish. Or it's not salty enough—the flavours flat and dull, nothing really distinguishing itself. One-dimensional. Boring.

Few recipes or chefs would advertise a dish by saying, *"This tastes like salt!"* And yet salt is found in nearly everything. Because what salt does best is work with other flavours. It enhances what is already there, draws flavour out, holds flavour together. Yet salt doesn't work in a vacuum, alone on a plate. Salt doesn't work in isolation.

In Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount that we hear today, Jesus calls the people "the salt of the earth." This teaching comes immediately after the Beatitudes, that part where he says, "Blessed are the meek... the merciful... the poor in spirit." Right after these blessings, Jesus tells the people—and us, of course—*You are the salt of the earth.*

Not the hero flavour, but absolutely essential.

He also tells them: "You are the light of the world." And, unsurprisingly, Jesus does not describe a light in isolation, but rather a light that exists for and within the world. He says, *"Let your light shine before others,"* not so that they may admire you, but *"so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* The light that comes from Jesus's love is not meant to be hidden or hoarded. It cannot exist in a vacuum or in isolation.

The point of the salt is not the salt itself.
The point of the light is not the light itself.

The point is God's glory.

Neither salt nor light makes sense on its own. Salt only works in relationship with other ingredients. Light shines so that others can see. Jesus's metaphors are about community, not individualism. They assume connection, relationship, interdependence: an ecosystem, not a solo performance.

This truth matters because Jesus's teachings—his life, and the many interpretations of what it means to follow him today—can sometimes feel heavy. Christianity can begin to feel like a list of obligations: duties to perform, rules to follow, disciplines to maintain. We may feel the weight of responsibility and effort pressing down on us. Our human impulse toward shame and secrecy can make living as a Christian feel like constantly failing a test, as if we are unworthy of grace and love because we haven't done enough, or done well enough. The cycle of guilt can be lonely and isolating.

But remember that Jesus once said in John, "I have come so that you might have life and have it to the fullest." Freedom. Liberty. Abundance.

Even within that tightrope walk of relationship and responsibility, there is freedom.

The prophet Isaiah lays right into it. He calls out religious leaders who have leaned too far into obligation and legalism, but forgotten the abundant spaciousness that comes from God. He names the fasting, self-inflicted oppression, and penitence that serve only one's own self and reputation. Spiritual disciplines like fasting and penitence can be healthy, meaningful, and life-giving, but only if they point to God.

The messages we receive from the prophet Isaiah and the Messiah Jesus are the same: Do not perform righteousness for show. Don't act so that people can see your good works, but to give glory to God in heaven. Let your actions loosen the bonds of injustice. Let them feed the hungry, shelter the oppressed, and clothe the naked.

The freedom we seek as Christians, as followers of Christ, is bigger than ourselves, and our own self-righteousness. The goal of our life isn't to be free in the sense of being able to do whatever we want, without consequence. The freedom we seek—through our spiritual practices and prayers and worship and teaching and learning—is freedom from oppression for *all*.

What good is fasting if we ignore the hungry?

What good is penitence if we ignore those who are tortured?

What good is religious devotion if we turn away from the poor, the lonely, the sick, the forgotten?

The freedom we desire is that *all people* may know they are loved, safe, protected, and nourished—spiritually, yes, but also physically, emotionally, and mentally. If we are all connected in the spiritual ecosystem of this broken and hurting world, then one person oppressed affects each one of us.

It is tempting to leave the reading from Matthew with the image of the city on a hill. But after his discussion of salt and light, Jesus cautions us against taking God's freedom as a free-for-all. The freedom Jesus brings isn't to say that "none of those old laws matter anymore," but rather to remind us that the law must always point to God. Jesus is famous for re-interpreting the ancient religious law in ways that challenge religious leaders, and that's the kind of freedom he brings when he says, *"I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."* He's saying, follow the law. Do the rites and rituals. They matter. But don't do it for show, for self-righteousness, or for attention. They only matter when they serve justice and life for the whole world.

Does your life point to God's freedom?

Look at your calendar—how you spend your time.

Your budget—how you spend your money.

Your relationships—who receives your energy and care.

The way you travel, where you shop, how you vote, who you listen to and speak with.

Do these choices point toward the glory of God in heaven?

Do they bring love and justice for the poor, the oppressed, the lonely, the sick?

Look at your spiritual practices.

Your prayer life—does it exist only privately, or only at the dinner table when guests arrive?

Your Bible study—does it draw you deeper into Scripture and community, or become another excuse for gossip?

Your intentions/fasts/resolutions—do they bring you closer to God, or are you using religious disciplines as an excuse to diet?

The ways we welcome, serve, learn, and connect at church matter. All of our rites and rituals, our traditions and beliefs, are gifts that God has given to us. They simply must point to God, and not ourselves (or our buildings, our legacy, our reputation).

We have been set free from self-righteousness, from the tally sheet of sin, from the law of restriction, by Jesus Christ, through his radical, world-shaking love. We are neither heroes nor expendable—but we are essential in the community of God's church and God's world.

Whatever we do, may we do it in such a way that all glory is given to God in heaven.

Responding in Thanksgiving

HYMN Love Is the Touch

MV 89

1. Love is the touch of intangible joy;
love is the force that no fear can destroy;
love is the goodness we gladly applaud:
God is where love is, for love is of God.
2. Love is the lilt in a lingering voice;
love is the hope that can make us rejoice;
love is the cure for the frightened and flawed:
God is where love is, for love is of God.
3. Love is the light in the tunnel of pain;
love is the will to be whole once again;
love is the trust of a friend on the road:
God is where love is, for love is of God.
4. Love is the Maker and Spirit and Son;
love is the kingdom their will has begun;
love is the path which the saints all have trod:
God is where love is, for love is of God.

INVITATION TO GIVE

Let us celebrate how others have been Christ to us. Let us celebrate that we have been Christ to us. Let us celebrate that we have the opportunity to be Christ for others. Let us once again commit our time, talent, and treasure to God's love for all!

OFFERING HYMN All Is Given for the Glory of God

(Verse 4) MV 34

All is giv'n for the glory of God.
Amen! Amen!
All depends upon our glorious God.
Amen! Amen!
Amen! Amen! Amen!
All is giv'n for the glory of God.
Amen! Amen!

OFFERING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for the opportunities to be your presence, your attentiveness, and your message of love. Thank you for making us a community and for sharing our gifts in the community around us. Thank you for this particular community. Bless all we give, and all we receive, and bless all people with your loving words. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Light of Christ

Gathering

**Light of Christ shine in and through me,
Light of Love be with me now.
Take these hands, healing hands.
Light of Christ flow through me now.**

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 We're the Light of All the World

TLUS 30

**We're the light of all the world, we are a city on a hill,
We're a candle on a stand, proclaiming light,
We will not hide our lamp beneath a bushel anymore,
We will shine a ray of hope that's burning bright.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace
For the flood of tears will fin'ly cease to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
Paint the world in colours proud and hold and free.**

**My coat of many colours, sewn from many diff'rent threads,
Cov'ring all in warmth, in welcoming and in grace,
God said :Let there be light," created every varied shade,
In the rainbow each of us can find a place.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace
For the flood of tears will fin'ly to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
paint the world in colours, proud and bold and free.**

**We're the hope to still believe in tomorrow's better day,
We are peace in a world that's torn apart,
We are joy that will last in all the struggles that we face
As the mourning night of tears breaks into day.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace,
For the flood of tears will fin'ly to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
Paint the world in colours, proud and bold and free.**

**We're the face of storms of life, we will never be alone,
For our God will be with us on the way,
Here we are, side by side, we won't be frightened any more,
As the mourning night if tears breaks into day.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace,
For the flood of tears will fin'ly to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
Paint the world in colours, proud and bold and free.**

SENDING FORTH

May blessings abound around you this day.
Feeling God's loving presence among us, let us go forth into the world,
allowing our light to shine on all we meet.
Go from this place knowing you are never alone,
for you go with God, the Source of Love...

SUNG AMEN

VU 969 (Kriewald)

MUSIC TO SEND US FORTH

The Bishop's Fanfare

End of Worship – Beginning of Service

MUSICAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We welcome you and thank you for joining us this morning.

Please join us in Fraser Hall following the service for coffee and fellowship.

Todays Music

- ♪ Blessed Jesus, We Are Here - *Liebster Jesu, Wir Sind Hier (III)*, BWV 706. A chorale prelude by Johann Sebastian Bach (1665-1750). This registration highlights the organ's Baroque flute stops.
- ♪ Be Still and Know - Hymn prelude by Andrew Moore (b. 1954), English composer and Catholic priest. This arrangement makes use of the organ's orchestral sounds.
- ♪ The Bishop's Fanfare - Christopher Tambling (1964 - 2015), British composer, organist and choirmaster. This registration highlights the organ's powerful reed stops including the Bombarde 16' in the pedals.



Shrove Tuesday
February 17th, 5:30 to 7 pm
Admission: Donation at the Door

Our Ash Wednesday will follow the Pancake Supper

Lenten / Easter Services

Palm Sunday: March 29th, 10:30 am
Maundy Thursday: April 2nd, 7 pm
Good Friday: April 3rd, 10:30 am
Easter Sunday: April 5th, 10:30 am

Our Ministry Team...

Coordinating Minister: Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole, ex 24; Revtbc.gsj@gmail.com
Children's Church Leader: Kayla Cseh, ex 22; Childrenschurch.gsj@gmail.com
Minister of Music: Paul Grose, ex 25; min.music.gsj@gmail.com
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