

# PARKDALE UNITED CHURCH

building connections – living faith – acting for justice

November 22, 2020 Calgary, Alberta

## REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY

*The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate,  
to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*

Mahatma Gandhi

### PRELUDE

### WELCOME

### CHRIST CANDLE

### WORDS OF GATHERING

God of sanctuary,

*we come to you to be centered and safe.*

God of compassion and care,

*we gather in your presence, a loving embrace.*

God of kindness and wisdom,

*we ask you to whisper encouragement and guidance.*

God of creation and beauty,

*we thank you for your blessings, goodness, and grace.*

O God, we have known you in moments of joy and wonder,

*and we have felt your healing in times of pain and suffering.*

Lead us into your truth and ways, that we might live in your light.

*In this time of worship, we seek your gifts of revelation, gentling of anxious hearts,  
lifting of weary spirits, and direction for living with compassion and hope. Amen.*

### HYMN Psalm 100, Make a Joyful Noise VU 820 verses 1 – 2

Make a joyful noise all the earth! Worship your God with gladness.

Make a joyful noise all the earth! Come to this place with a song!

Know that your God has made you. Know it's to God you belong

And come to this place with joyfulness and praise. Worship your God with a song!

Make a joyful noise all the earth! Worship your God with gladness.

Make a joyful noise all the earth! Come to this place with a song!

Enter these gates, thanks giving. Enter these courts with praise.

Sing thanks to your God and bless the holy Name. Worship your God with a song!

Make a joyful noise all the earth! Worship your God with gladness.

Make a joyful noise all the earth! Come to this place with a song!

## PRAYER

*Again, O God, we come, seeking  
music for our voices,  
gospel for our hearts,  
courage for our spirits,  
purpose for our lives,  
and actions for our hands and feet.  
Find us in this time of worship, we pray. Amen.*

## STEPS IN FAITH

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 25: 31 – 46

### REFLECTIONS

(by Beth Balshaw)

This scripture passage begins with an announcement that a day of reckoning is coming when all of us will be judged for the choices we have made along the way. At first glance, this seems to be a story of good news and bad news – good news for the obedient sheep, bad news for the stubborn goats. The cooperative, compliant sheep who do good deeds will earn a pat on the head and a blessing; they will inherit the kingdom, a place of eternal bliss. The goats who don't do good deeds will be cursed and banished to eternal fire. If we take the warning to heart, the choice seems obvious – do good things so you'll get a place at God's right hand and end up in heaven. If you don't, too bad for you! This story has some concerning aspects but I think we can also glean some helpful lessons.

**My first concern** is that it describes an exclusive club where some people are "in" and some people are "out." Some people get a prize and others are excluded. If you jump through the right hoops in the right way, you get a ticket to "the good place." If you don't get it right, you go to "the bad place." Probably all of us have had experiences where we are one of the "in" group or we're one of the "out" group. We've had experiences of success and experiences of falling short. It doesn't feel good to be in the "in" group, knowing that others have been excluded. And it most certainly doesn't feel good to be in the "out" group, envying those who have made the cut. An exclusive club leaves no room for learning as we go, getting second chances to do better, discovering our capacity for loving by making mistakes. It feels like harsh judgement that focuses more on punishment than creating opportunities for growth. And that doesn't sound very compassionate or loving.

**Another concern** is that the focus on the story seems to be on the consequence of our actions rather than the actions themselves or our intentions. It sets it up so the sheep and goats are focused more on what's in it for them, rather than on practising loving kindness because loving kindness is its own reward. The risk is that the sheep and goats become motivated either by a bribe or by fear. The reward or punishment becomes the motivation. If you do good deeds, you'll get a treat. If you don't do good deeds, you'll get punished. People might choose to do good deeds to get the reward and avoid the punishment – not because they have actually bought in to the value of loving actions or found any joy in loving actions. They might exhibit behavior that looks loving but it has no heart; they might be doing the right thing at times but for the wrong reason.

One of our children came home from school one day and announced, "My friend's parents said they will give him \$5 for every A he gets on his report card. What will you give me if I get As?" My loving response was to raise my eyebrows and say, "Boo hoo for you. I'm not going to pay you anything!" After hearing a groan of disappointment, I explained, "For sure there will be a reward but it won't come from me. If you decide to prepare for your exams, study conscientiously and earn some A's, this will be your reward: you will learn a

lot of really cool and interesting things, you will feel proud of yourself for doing a good job, and your good marks will open some doors of opportunity. If you decide to goof off and not bother to prepare for your exams, this will be your consequence: you may feel disappointed in yourself, some doors may close to you and you may limit your opportunities down the road. The choice is up to you. I don't want you study because I promise to pay you \$5. I want you to study because you love to learn.

**I think this is really what God wants us to understand.** I think God wants us to love learning and to love loving. I think God wants us to love one another – because we are motivated by the joy of making a difference, because we get to be a part of creating a just and peaceful world, because we are grateful for our abundant blessings and want to share them with others – not because the reward will be a seat in heaven at God's right hand or a trophy or our name on a building or an award bestowed on us or a promotion. I think God wants us to love one another for the love of doing it and because of the delight of being in loving partnership with God. I think God wants our motivation to come from within. I think God wants us to love one another because it is the right thing to do and because we want to – not because we are living in fear of eternal punishment and hellfire if we don't.

**It might be worth pondering what loving actions can look like** – looking not only at “why” we love but also “how” we love. If we make a big show of our loving actions, we fall into the trap of loving to get recognition (or a seat at God's right hand). “Did you see that I did the dishes? Did you notice that I helped out at the Food Bank? Did you see that I made a donation?” I suspect it is better to love quietly, behind the scenes, and maybe even anonymously instead of drawing attention to our actions.

Matthew's gospel tells us that every time we treat others with kindness and love, it is as if we are loving God. One way to love is to support agencies that provide practical love.

**“I was hungry and you gave me food.”** The Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger. It works with locally-based organizations in developing countries to meet emergency food needs and achieve long-term solutions to hunger. Closer to home, the Calgary Board of Education and the Calgary Food Bank have a school-based partnership, Weekends and More that was created to address the problem of chronic hunger in local elementary and junior high students. The program provides nutritious hampers to meet the needs of students on the weekends when they are away from school meal programs so they can stay focused on their learning. Weekends and More also helps students and families who are facing food insecurity to connect with resources in the community to help them break the cycle of hunger.

**“I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”** The Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitization Technology, CAWST, is a Canadian charity that addresses the global need for safe drinking water and sanitation by building local knowledge and skills on household solutions people can implement themselves.

Dr. Jan Tollefson, a member of Parkdale United until she died in 2015, founded an NGO called *Add Your Light*. Jan's prime focus was the poorest regions of the Dominican Republic where she made a profound difference in improving peoples' lives through the bio-sand water filter project and the LED solar lighting project.

**“I was sick and you took care of me.”** Doctors Without Borders was founded by 13 doctors and journalists who believed that all people have the right to medical care regardless of gender, race, religion, creed or political affiliation, and that the needs of these people outweigh respect for national boundaries. The core purpose of the organization is to deliver humanitarian medical care to people who have been made vulnerable by conflict, crisis, disaster or neglect.

**Although participating in the work of agencies like these is a great way to love our neighbours, we don't need agencies to love on our behalf.** We can perform loving acts of kindness ourselves for the people we meet in our own communities. We have hard-working, passionate saints within our congregation who are working tirelessly and lovingly to help find homes for the homeless, welcome and support our refugee family from Eritrea, and feed the hungry through our sandwich-making ministries. Our acts of love don't have to be grandiose; in fact, most acts of love are not. Love can look like phoning a friend who is housebound and having a visit, offering to pick up some groceries for a neighbour, doing a few errands for a friend who is feeling overwhelmed, making tea for a visitor, shovelling the neighbour's sidewalk, reading a story to a child. Love looks like doing small things that make a big difference, just for the fun of it, with no expectation of a reward.

And when we do that – when we do small, loving acts of kindness; when we see the face of God in every person we meet – we don't need to wait for a reward in heaven. **We're already in heaven – right here, right now!**

**HYMN** Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love VU 593 verses 2 – 4

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbours we have from you.

Neighbours are rich and poor, varied in colour and race, neighbours are near and far away.

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbours we have from you.

These are the ones we should serve, these are the ones we should love, all are neighbours to us and you.

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbours we have from you.

Kneel at the feet of our friends, silently washing their feet, this is the way we should live with you.

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbours we have from you.

Words, Tom Colvin; Music Ghanaian folk song  
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## **PRAYERS FOR THE DAY**

Joys and Concerns

Gathered Prayer

The Lord's Prayer A Translation VU 916

Our Father-Mother, who is in the heavens, may your name be made holy, may your dominion come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today the bread we need; and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors; and do not put us to the test, but rescue us from evil.

For yours is the dominion, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Words: United Church of Christ  
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## **OFFERINGS**

Hymn For Food in a World VU 552

For food in a world where many walk in hunger, for friends in a world where many walk alone,  
For faith in a world where many walk in fear, we give you thanks, O God.

Words, Gisela Wester  
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Prayer

*A blessing on these gifts! A blessing on the givers!*

*A blessing on our intentions! A blessing on the work that will be done!*

*A blessing on the world, waiting and hoping for justice, peace and the well-being of all. Amen.*

## **LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH**

**HYMN** When I Needed a Neighbour VU 600, verses 1 - 4

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there? I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there? I was cold, I was naked, were you there?

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there? When I needed a healer, were you there?

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?

Words and Music, Sydney Carter  
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**BENEDICTION**

*Sent out in Jesus' name, our hands are ready now*

*to make the world the place in which God's kingdom comes.*

*The angels cannot change a world of hurt and pain into a world of love, of justice and of peace.*

*The task is ours to do, to set it really free. God, help us to carry out your will.*

Words, traditional song, Cuba; translated Jorge Maldonado, adapted.  
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**CHORAL BLESSING** I am Walking a Path of Peace MV 221

I am walking a path of peace, I am walking a path of peace, I am walking a path of peace,  
lead me home, lead me home.

I am walking a path of love, I am walking a path of love, I am walking a path of love,  
lead me home, lead me home.

I am walking a path of hope, I am walking a path of hope, I am walking a path of hope,  
lead me home, lead me home.

I am walking a path of joy, I am walking a path of joy, I am walking a path of joy,  
lead me home, lead me home.

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**POSTLUDE**

**MINISTER**

Rev. Murray Laverty D.Min.

**MUSICIAN**

Michael Coburn

**LAY READER**

Nick Finn

**LAY WORSHIP LEADER**

Beth Balshaw

**SOUND**

Kevin Kepke

**WORSHIP SCREENS**

Jim Balshaw

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**WORSHIP HOSTS**

Wayne and Charlotte Flood, Emily Flood, Eleanor Kenny