

# PARKDALE UNITED CHURCH

building connections – living faith – acting for justice

Sunday, April 25, 2021

*Helped are those who find the courage to do at least one small thing each day,  
to help the existence of another – plant, animal, river, human being.*

*They shall be joined by a multitude of the timid.*

Alice Walker

*Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy.*

Abraham Heschel

## PRELUDE

## CHRIST CANDLE

## WORDS OF GATHERING

This is the day that God has made. Let us rejoice,  
giving thanks for the newness of life offered to us.

*We are glad for warmth, for greening grass and budding flowers,  
for soft breezes and the music of birds, for gentle raindrops upon the earth.*

On this day of hope and new life, we are reminded that God dwells  
with us and within all creation.

*We remember we are called to be partners with God in creation.*

Let us join in celebrating God's gift of life.

## HYMN Come, Let Us Sing VU 222 verses 1 – 3

Come, let us sing to the Lord our song, we have stood silently too long;  
surely the Lord deserves our praise, so joyfully thank God for our days.

O thirsty soul, come drink at the well, God's living waters will never fail.  
Surely the Lord will help you to stand, strengthened and comforted by God's hand.

You dwell among us and cause us to pray, and walk with each other following your way;  
our precious brothers and sisters will grow in the fulfilling love they know.

Words; Music, Jim Strathdee

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## PRAYER

Eternal God, whose image lies in the hearts of all people,  
we live among peoples,

*whose languages are different from our own,*

*whose faiths are foreign to us,*

*whose ways we fail to understand.*

Help us to remember,

*that you embrace all people with your love,*

*that all religion is a response to you,*

*that the yearnings of other hearts*

*are much like our own and are known to you.*

Help us to recognize you,

*In words of truth, things of beauty,*

*and actions of love about us.*

We pray in the name of the One who call us,

*to be neighbour and friend. Amen.*

## STEPS IN FAITH

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 23 VU 749

1 John 3: 16 – 24

### REFLECTIONS

I was part of a Zoom meeting recently. We had not been together for a while and began our time with a check in question, “What have you noticed living in these Covid times?” There were a wide variety of responses. People spoke about practicing gratitude, appreciating family and good friends, time to cook and read, being and living local, walking in parks and neighbourhoods, noticing beauty and nature. It was a good reconnection exercise. I loved hearing people lifting some positives from this Covid time where we all have experienced some challenges and difficulties.

My Covid observation was the significant shift in the rhythm of my life, and the way I orient myself in the changing seasons. I have worked in pastoral ministry for almost thirty-eight years. In that time, my weekly rhythm centered on the Sunday morning worship service, the preparation and orchestration of that event. There were plenty of other activities, people and responsibilities that filled the time each day of the week, but Sunday morning came every week, ready or not. In similar fashion, there were seasons that framed my church calendar year. Early summer church camps and continuing education courses, late summer was Fall programs and church calendar planning, September beginnings, an Operating Financial Campaign in October, Advent – Christmas seasons, January Annual Reports and AGM, Lent – Easter season, the Garage Sale and then summer beginnings. There were many other things that filled each year, but those were touch points every year, year after year.

Covid turned that pattern upside down. Now Sunday worship and sermon reflections are ready for mailing on Friday morning. Many of the things that used to happen could not happen, did not happen, or were modified. I have been working from home, physically distancing, meetings and visits almost exclusively by phone and Zoom. The rhythm is radically different. Many of the anticipated predictable pivot points have shifted. What I noticed this year included many of those traditional pivot points in time, and I have been far more attentive to nature and the changes in those seasons. Last summer I wore shorts and sandals everyday, and never knotted a tie. Ann and I walked through two pair of running shoes each, gardened, cooked, read books and spent far more time together than we ever have. The days cooled and shortened, we bundled up to embrace the cold and found ourselves going to sleep earlier. At Winter solstice I noticed the moon and night sky, and we cross-country skied in the snow. Recently, I have noticed, felt, and appreciated the lengthening days, the warming sun, and the fresh energetic rebirth of life in Spring. In each of the seasons, I have delighted in being in nature, hearing bird songs, and seeing other creatures that live in our urban landscape.

Interestingly, similar things happen every year, year after year, in my life. However, this year, in Covid time, my changed routines have forced me and provided time for me to notice, listen, and act differently. So, I ask you to consider, “What have you noticed living in these Covid times?” I think “noticing”, “listening”, and “acting”, are ways we come to experience God. These are spiritual practices that help us be attentive to God’s presence.

*Lectio Divina* is a Christian spiritual practice dating to the third century. There are several ways to engage in this contemplative prayer practice that intends a “listening with the heart” to what God might want to offer or say. One of the easiest ways to practice *Lectio Divina* by yourself or with others is to take a scriptural text, read it out loud, listening for words or phrases that seem to stand out or that you notice. After hearing the text, pause for a few moments to sit with the text. Consider the words or phrases. Listen with your heart to what they might be suggesting, imagining, or inviting. The task is not to rationally interpret the text, nor wring out every idea or insight it might hold. Rather, it is a prayerful listening for God, a trusting the scriptures are a living voice for God to speak to the heart concerns of today. After a time, read the text a second time out loud.

Let the words land gently, and again note the phrases or words that warm your heart or linger in your imagination. Now, take some time to listen and imagine what those words might invite you to do, to consider or change. If you practice *Lectio Divina* by yourself, you might want to make a few notes to yourself. These are prayerful reflections on what you heard, felt, considered, and what that might mean for your living. If you practice *Lectio Divina* with others you might after making some notes, take a few minutes to share some of the thoughts or ideas that came to you.

On the fourth Sunday of Easter every year, we read and hear Psalm 23. It is a beautiful poem, an intimate prayer of trust in God presence, guidance, and care. I suggest this is a perfect scripture text to sit with for a time. I encourage you to use the spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*, to listen with your heart to the familiar and timeless words of Psalm 23. I am confident you will hear something new or needed, something inviting and energizing, something engaging and life giving. Listen with your heart to what God might be encouraging for you and your living in this Covid time. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN** In Loving Partnership We Come VU 603

In loving partnership we come, seeking, O God, your will to do.  
Our prayers and actions now receive, we freely offer them to you.

We are the hands and feet of Christ, serving by grace each other's need.  
We dare to risk and sacrifice with truthful word and faithful deed.

Loving community we seek; your hope and strength within us move.  
The poor and rich, the strong and weak are brought together in your love.

In loving partnership, O God, help us your future to proclaim.  
Justice and peace be our desire, we humbly pray in Jesus' name.

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**PRAYERS FOR THE DAY**

Joys and Concerns  
Gathered Prayer  
Prayer

*O God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth;  
lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust;  
lead us from hate to love, from war to peace.  
Let your peace fill our hearts, our living, our world. Amen.*

**OFFERINGS**

Interlude  
Response Grant Us, God, the Grace VU 540

Grant us, God, the grace of giving, with a spirit large and free,  
that ourselves and all our living we may offer faithfully.

Words, anonymous; Music, attrib. Christian F. Will, adapt. Henry John Gauntlett  
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Prayer

*God of spring splendour, we offer these gifts with thankful hearts. May these offerings become hope for the troubled, care for the lonely and grace for those who mourn. Grant us hearts that willingly share and spirits that joyfully proclaim our life and hope in you! Amen.*

**LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH**

**HYMN** God Who Gives to Life Its Goodness VU 260

God who gives to life its goodness, God creator of all joy,  
God who gives to us our freedom, God who blesses tool and toy:  
teach us now to laugh and praise you, deep within your praises sing,  
till the whole creation dances for the goodness of its King.

God who fills the earth with beauty, God who binds each friend to friend,  
God who names us co-creators, God who wills that chaos end:  
grant us now creative spirits, minds responsive to your mind,  
hearts and wills your rule extending all our acts by Love refined.

Words, Walter Farquharson; Music Cyril Vincent Taylor  
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**PRAYER**

**BENEDICTION**

*Go out into the world in peace;  
have courage;  
hold on to what is good;  
return no one evil for evil;  
strengthen the fainthearted;  
support the weak and help the suffering;  
honour all people;  
love and serve the Lord;  
and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**CHORAL BLESSING** What Can I Do? MV 191

What can I do? What can I bring? What can I say? What can I sing?  
I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer. I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

Words; Music, Paul Rumbolt and Michele McCarthy, arr. Alan C. Whitmore  
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**PRAYER**

**POSTLUDE**

**MINISTER**

Rev. Murray Laverty D.Min.

**MUSICIAN**

Michael Coburn

**LAY READER**

**SOUND**

Kevin Kepke

**WORSHIP SCREENS**

Jim and Beth Balshaw

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**WORSHIP HOSTS**

Nick Finn, Wayne and Charlotte Flood