

PARKDALE UNITED CHURCH

building connections – living faith – acting for justice

Sunday, May 2, 2021

God of creation, God of our hearts, we come into your presence seeking healing, direction, and hope for a new day. Fill our lives with your Spirit, that we might be renewed and equipped, to be your servants in working for a world of justice and peace. Amen.

We serve life best when we water it and befriend it.

When we listen before we act.

Rachel Naomi Remen

God is friendship.

Aelred of Rievaulx

PRELUDE

CHRIST CANDLE

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Be gracious unto us, O God, and bless us;
and let the light of your face shine upon us,
*that your ways may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.*

Hymn A Light Is Gleaming VU 82 (refrain)

*A light is gleaming, spreading its arms throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love is burning bright, living in the light.*

Words; Music, Linnea Good

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WORDS OF GATHERING

Wherever we go, God is always there.

God is behind us and before us.

God is above us and below us.

God is within us and around us.

And where God is, there is life; creative, healing, renewing life.

*God is with us, an embracing, encouraging, energizing love that is eternal,
and in this time and space, we come to celebrate God's gift of life!*

HYMN God, We Praise You for the Morning VU 415 verses 1 – 5

God, we praise you for the morning; hope springs forth with each new day,
new beginning, prayer, and promise, joy in work and in play.

God, we praise you for creation, mountains, seas, and prairie land.
Waking souls find joy and healing in your bountiful hand.

God, we praise you for compassion, all the loving that you show;
human touching, tears, and laughter, help your children to grow.

God, we praise you for your Spirit, Comforter and daily friend,
restless searcher, gently teacher, strength and courage you send.

God, we praise you for the Saviour, come that we may know your ways.
In his loving, dying, rising, Christ is Lord of our days.

Words, Jim Strathdee and Jean Strathdee; Music, Jim Strathdee

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PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the blessings of life.

We thank you for the wonders of the world:

*for heights of mountains and breadth of prairie,
for diversity of peoples and intimacy of families,
for the goodness of all you have made.*

We thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ,

*who lived and died, and lives again,
wherever justice is known, wherever love is found.*

We thank you for your life among us:

*forgiving sins, renewing spirits, guiding us as we resist evil,
calling us to your truth and to your service,
and refreshing us in the fellowship of your community.*

Grant, O God, that our hearts may grow in thankfulness,

for these and all your gifts of grace,

*so that as the people of new life,
we may proclaim your praise; in Jesus' name. Amen.*

STEPS IN FAITH

A LIFE-GIVING STORY How Wolves Change Rivers

<https://youtu.be/ysa5OBhXz-Q>

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 37: 1 – 6

John 1: 1 – 5

REFLECTIONS *God is Life-Giving* Ezekiel 37: 1 – 6 John 1: 1 – 5

Our worship series “Living in the Light” notes some of the elements that contribute to our personal and shared experience of being God’s people in the world. These elements overlap, connect with one another, and influence each other. Our Worship Arts team crafted this series mindful that we are in a time of endings and beginnings as a community of faith here at Parkdale United Church. Times like this are common and normal. Often, we need to choose when to let go of certain things and where we might need to hang on. We thought it might be helpful to consider some of those elements in these times a little more thoroughly. We hope this series will be helpful in discerning good and healthy choices for each of us in our faith living.

The prophet Ezekiel sees a valley littered with bones, dried out, disconnected, and lifeless bones. This vision bears witness to the defeat, despair, and death the people of Israel are experiencing in exile. Ezekiel is instructed to speak to the bones and the people, in order, to remind them they reside in the life-giving presence of God. In this presence, defeat and despair are transformed into hope and joy. The dried out and disconnected are refreshed and restored. Resurrection overcomes death and that which is lifeless breathes anew.

In the prologue of the gospel of John, we hear, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We are poetically introduced to God, who is creative and life-giving, and God’s human embodiment, Jesus. The author reminds us we reside in God’s presence. God illumines a way forward no matter how difficult the terrain. God is a light that shines through every depth of darkness, is a beacon birthing beauty, health, joy, and the wellbeing for all.

In the wonderful story, “How Wolves Change Rivers”, we see a natural account of healing and hope, of restoration and resurrection. There are numerous lessons to be drawn from this project. What stands out for me are the surprising, unanticipated consequences of choices made. It is startling how deeply connected,

interdependent, and influenced every part of that natural geography was on every other part. This story illustrates Ezekiel's vision and John's poetic image brought to life. It pictures what it means to live in the light of God's presence. It suggests God's life-giving presence includes healing, restoration, and surprise.

In these weeks, we here at Parkdale United Church are amidst a change in ministry staff. It is a time of endings and beginnings. It is a time of discerning choices about where we might need to hang on and when we might need to let go. These times and experiences are further complicated by Covid restrictions and health protocols. Many of the things we may want to do or would do naturally, we can not do. It often, for me, feels strange, difficult, and awkward.

So, what might our texts offer us in helping discern good and healthy choices for our faith living in this time of our congregational life?

- Like in Ezekiel, in the valley of bones and with the people in exile, we too share feelings of grief and loss. There are questions about the future, about the connections we have with each other, and the kind of community of faith we feel called to embody. This text is a powerful picture of God's restorative, life-giving energy. Yet, we note, that the bones and the people needed prophets to speak words for reconnection, renewal, and resurrection. I invite you to reflect on this question. What might you be called to say or do to echo Ezekiel's prophetic inspiration?
- In John, we hear the darkness has not overcome the light. Yet, that means, the darkness is real. We hear from John that words create life, and we may wonder what words will be useful, instructive, helpful, and energizing. I invite you to reflect on this question. How do we let the light shine through some of the cracks we are feeling or seeing in ourselves and in our community?
- In the beautiful story "How Wolves Change Rivers", we cannot help but be moved by the portrayal of abundant life. It is a profound documentary of regeneration, beauty restored, systems re-connected, and each contributing to the wellbeing of one and all. Yet, we note, it took time, persistence, and energy. I invite you to reflect on this question. Where do you feel called to invest yourself in the life and community of Parkdale United Church?

May each of us, be alert to all the ways God is life-giving in us, among us, and through us. May we be receptive to hope in uncertain times, love warming our hearts, and possibilities not yet anticipated or imagined.

So, we pray; Be gracious unto us, O God, and bless us; and let the light of your face shine upon us, that your ways may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Amen.

HYMN Ka mana'o 'I'O MV 103

Ka ma-na-'o 'I 'O o ko ka-kou A-ku - a. Faithful, faithful is our God.

Ka ma-na-'o 'I 'O o ko ka-kou A-ku - a. Faithful, faithful is our God.

In love there is no one more faithful than our God, who brings the light to our darkness.
The God who shares the breath of life with you and me, all living things upon the earth.

In quiet moments God whispers tenderly the mystery of unending love.
For God is good, and holds us as we sleep, to wake us to the morning light.

The mercy of our God we seek to share each day, to help each other on our way,
to be God's hands and heart with tenderness and care. God's faithfulness is always there.

When we share love, we share respect and care, the gifts and bonds of human kindness.
And in our journey, may love lead the way. To be God's living, sing this day.

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.*

OFFERINGS

Interlude

Response Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow VU 541

Praise God from whom all blessing flow; praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known; Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

Words, Thomas Ken; Music, Genevan Psalter
Public Domain

Prayer

*May your blessing, O God, bring these gifts to life:
new hope of healing; fresh ways of coping;
a chance to rest; a chance to work;
ways to live gracefully and let go peacefully.
May these gifts be used as Jesus would use them. Amen.*

LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

HYMN God of Still Waiting MV 20

God of still waiting, God of deep longing, God of the heart's true rest:
hold us in fathomless peace, guard us with unwaning love.

Spirit of promise, Spirit of purpose, Spirit of ceaseless prayer:
bathe us in life full and free, kindle our wonder and hope.

Word who comes to us, Word who lives with us, Word who disturbs and heals:
silence our chattering fears, waken our unconscious faith.

Word true and faithful, hope-bringing Spirit, God of enfolding love:
come in your fullness and grace; work through our lives for your praise.

Words; Carl P. Daw, Jr. ;Music, Alfred V. Fedak
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BENEDICTION

*Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid;
for it is the Lord your God who goes with you,
and God will not fail you or forsake you.*

CHORAL BLESSING When You Walk from Here VU 298

*When you walk from here, when you walk from here,
walk with justice, walk with mercy,
and with God's humble care.*

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POSTLUDE

MINISTER

Rev. Murray Laverty D.Min.

MUSICIAN

Michael Coburn

LAY READER

Nick Finn

SOUND

Kevin Kepke

WORSHIP SCREENS

Jim and Beth Balshaw

WORSHIP HOSTS

Nick Finn, Wayne & Charlotte Flood