

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

April 26, 2020

Welcome to Worship, Third Sunday of Easter
Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, April 26
Email absolute_solutions@live.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Welcome

Welcome to worship! I'm Jill Bennett. We are so happy that you joined us. Though we are not together physically, we are together virtually thanks to technology and Holy Spirit. Thank you to the important people behind the scenes who made this online worship happen - Eric Maag, Torrin Maag and Alison Warner-Smith. Thank you as well to Kevin Conrad for helping today.

If you are watching this service on Sunday morning, please join us for a virtual coffee hour via Zoom at 11:30 today. Please contact Leslie Cassidy for the information you will need to join. Details are in the NEWS that was emailed to you on Thursday and on the Facebook page.

Now let us prepare for worship together. Let us become connected by God's love as we enter worship.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We take a moment to remember the lives and spirituality of the people who cared for this land long before us, the Atikemekshing Anishnawbek and the Wahnapiatae First Nation. At St. Andrew's, we worship on their traditional territory. If you join us from an area other than Sudbury, I invite you to acknowledge whose traditional territory you live and worship on. We are grateful for this land, and our First Peoples who cared for it, and we commit to walking together in faithfulness and reconciliation.

Lighting the Christ Candle

Take this quiet moment, breathe deeply, and focus for a moment on the blessings you enjoy in your life. It might be family, some dear friends, your health (great or fragile as it is, you are alive, this is a new day God has given you and I). So breathe, give thanks for a few seconds. [pause]

Jesus' life and ministry, his death and resurrection, teach us about the limitless depth and breadth and height of God's grace. A grace that enfolds with comfort and healing, peace and promise, hope and nurture, life and death. Let us light the Christ candle (Sophia lights) and ponder how in life, in death, in life beyond death, God is always with us. I invite you to proclaim with me: Hallelujah, God is always with us. **Hallelujah, God is always with us.**

Call to Worship

One: Christ Has Risen!

All: He Has Risen, Indeed!

One: People are often unreasonable and self-centred. Forgive them anyway.

All: With God's love, be a blessing.

One: If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.

All: With God's love, be a blessing.

One: If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

All: With God's love, be a blessing.

One: The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow.

All: With God's love, be a blessing.

One: Do good. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.

All: With God's love, be a blessing.

One: For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

All: With God's love be a blessing.

One: Come, let us worship.

Opening Prayer

Holy One, we bring our undivided selves to worship this day. We bring our certainty and our doubts. We bring our despair and our hope. We bring our fear and our assurance. We bring our total selves into this community, that we may worship you as people broken yet seeking to be made whole. As we worship, may your Spirit bless and renew us through the promise of resurrection. And we pray the prayer that Jesus taught...

The Prayer Jesus Taught

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kin-dom 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 kin-dom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: MV 8 And on This Path

And on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide!
Open wide! Open wide! Open wide!
The gates are open wide!

So enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,
so enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,
so enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide!
Open wide! Open wide! Open wide!
The gates are open wide!

Words: Lynn Bauman, © 2000 Lynn Bauman

Music: Linnea Good, © 2003 Borealis Music

Bible Reading

Today's reading is a paraphrase of the reading from Luke's Gospel, chapter 24, starting at the 13th verse. This is entitled *On the Way to Emmaus*.

On the morning of the Resurrection, two companions were making their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This journey would take them approximately 11 kilometres/7 miles. The two companions were talking about all that had happened and were discussing the events of the day with each other. We know from scripture that one was called Cleopas.

As they were talking, a third traveller came alongside them. It was Jesus, but the two companions did not recognize him. The Bible does not tell us why. Perhaps, their grief over losing Jesus had clouded their thoughts and vision both physically and spiritually. The stranger asked the two travellers what they were talking about as they travelled this road together. Their faces were sullen.

Cleopas replied, "Are you just a visitor, do you know what events have happened in Jerusalem over the last few days?"

"What events?" asked Jesus.

"The events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "Jesus was powerful, and the presence of God was with him. He was able to perform many miracles. He was handed over to the Romans to be sentenced and ultimately crucified. We thought Jesus would free Israel from the oppression of Rome. Some of the women that followed Jesus went to the tomb this morning, but they didn't find his body in the tomb. Mary Magdalene says she saw Jesus, that he is alive! Some of the men followed and found his tomb empty, but they didn't see Jesus."

The stranger answered, "Didn't the prophets say that the Messiah would suffer and that his suffering would lead to a path of glory?"

They arrived in Emmaus, but the stranger continued on. It seemed he had further to go.

"It is nearly dark, come and stay with us" urged Cleopas.

As this third traveller sat at the table, he took the bread, and gave God thanks, broke the bread, and began to pass the bread to the two. It was at this moment that their eyes were open to what was before them. It was Jesus who had travelled with them! When all hope seemed lost, Jesus had travelled alongside. And it was Jesus who was breaking the bread. Suddenly, Jesus was gone.

"How could we not know this was Jesus? Weren't his words touching our souls as we journeyed to Emmaus? We must go back to Jerusalem at once." Arriving in Jerusalem, they found the others and told them about what happened on their journey home, and how they recognized Jesus when he broke the bread. (Pause.) I wonder what the others thought about all of this.

Response to the Bible Reading

One: On the road to Emmaus the travellers did not realize the blessing that was in their midst and travelling with them.

All: **God blesses us unexpectedly, and in ways we cannot imagine. The impossible is possible with God.**

One: He broke bread amongst them and then their eyes saw the gift that had been with them on the road to Emmaus.

All: **God's blessings are all around us as God-presence always. May we see those gifts anew around us. Amen.**

Message - *Inviting in the Stranger*

This week after the news story broke of a shooting in Nova Scotia, hearing new detail after new detail, each seeming surreal, unfathomable. I have to confess, I was stunned... Then I felt disconsolate... helpless... I grieved... At times I felt anger that such an incident should not happen. **Not in small**, caring communities. Not in Canada. It isn't fair.

My friends, all of us isolating at home, living this ongoing daily loop, as my colleague Catherine calls it, “**Groundhog Day**,” referring to the movie about a man who finds himself waking up every morning living out the same day over and over tediously living out the same experiences day after day after day. Easter has come, and gone and with all that’s gone on, I’m not certain that I experienced the job of Easter as I usually do – or perhaps the transformative impact has not stuck for me in this groundhog day existence.

I look at Cleopas and his companion on their 7-mile journey; powerful experiences of Jesus on roads are a signature of the storytelling for the Gospel of Luke.¹ Leaving behind them in Jerusalem the ashen remains of their hopes for a Messiah, the two travellers walk back to whatever awaits them. On a 7-mile walk, there is an abundance of time to ponder.

A stranger joins them, asks them why they are forlorn, and they tell him that they heard good news, Easter news, from the witnesses who found an empty tomb – they heard the News – but still these men are grieving! Their reaction to this mysterious stranger, does it seem vaguely familiar to you? Hearts broken, hope shattered, faith bruised. I can relate to that feeling – I’m guessing you can too. Left to meander where it wishes, our mind can latch onto hurt, disappointment, grief, and not let go. It’s important work, you know, acknowledging our true pain.

But this Emmaus story translated into modern terms meets us on our long walk from Easter to who-knows-where; from the hum drum daily loop of life, maybe holding onto the thin thread of hope that some glimmer of light or good news lays ahead of us on this road. If we are lucky we hold that hope.

This coronavirus shadow can do that... THEN when we watch the news, bad news of tragedy hitting our peaceful neighbourhood called Canada. Well, well, we might not notice the stranger coming alongside us wanting to reveal something of wonder and good news to us.

Easter resurrection hope does not come based on a calendar or a clock - the biblical word for when holy moments come is “Kairos”² ... as in Cleopas and his friend experienced a Kairos moment. Wonder and hope take hold in our lives not based on human time but, rather, it is God’s time when those moments come. That moment came, not on that road to Emmaus for those two, but it was after they offered the stranger in, and as the stranger took over as host, shared bread and wine, then, finally, their eyes and hearts opened – Christ was risen.

So I’m thinking aloud here. Maybe many of us are on this road to Emmaus these days. Confined to our homes, physically distanced from loved ones, living routinized days and all of us normalized by what seems like daily bad news.

Maybe WE are invited by Cleopas and his unnamed companion to first of all hold onto the Easter message, even if we don’t feel it. Hold in our hearts a glimmer of hope that in the worst days for followers of Jesus, when they, we, very possibly have given up hope – God answers with resurrection and hope. If we are frustrated, grieving, angry, disillusioned then the Easter story may not be sinking in. It obviously didn’t for Cleopas and his friend. But

¹ Eric Barreto. Commentary on Luke 24:13-35. workingpreacher.com April 26, 2020.

² Shannon Michael Pater, “Pastoral Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.*

may we pay attention for signs of new life and wonder all around us even as we go about our Groundhog Day routines.

My partner Tracey pays attention to every bird visiting our deck to enjoy seed, and all of us in the house get to hear about it. It makes me smile. I find the wee hours of the morning, a clear sky filled with stars, beckons me to welcome wonder into my soul. Where is the stranger along your Emmaus road of routine, or, perhaps lurking in your peripheral vision, requiring you to take notice, to pay attention and invite encounter?

One Bible scholar suggests that:

Easter does not always come in three days.

Stones are rolled away, but sometimes we stay in the tomb...

Can you be attentive and receptive to our Creator's rhythm? If Luke's story on that Emmaus Road is going to have an impact, Shannen Michael Pater suggests that we need to make a choice. We can stay in the abstract, keep an intellectual distance, like those travellers who wondered – I paraphrase, "How could it have been that we did not recognize him?!"

We have another choice, other than seeing this as just a story. We can occupy the bodies and souls of those travellers having welcomed in the stranger, and discovering that Jesus had become their host – we, like them, can be fully present. Linger in every moment of wonder, allowing the holy stranger to disperse the clouds of despair and cynicism in us. To allow the inbreaking of God's Good News.

Let's be real and honest about our grief, despair, worry right now. But, let us also be attentive to strangers along our daily paths that might bring us wonder. And when that Kairos, God-given moment of wonder arrives, dare to share the story you are gifted with, with its joy, and good news. Like Tracey not letting anyone ignore those birds. who in your life needs to hear your stories of wonder so that they can encounter the stranger on their Emmaus Road?

Hymn: VU 184 As We Walked Home at Close of Day

As we walked home at close of day,
a stranger joined us on our way.
He heard us speak of one who'd gone,
and when we stopped, he carried on.

"Why wander further without light?
Please stay with us this troubled night.
We've shared the truth of how we feel
and now would like to share a meal."

No stranger he; it was our eyes
which failed to see, in stranger's guise,
the Lord who, risen from the dead,
met us when ready to be fed.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
As Mary and our sisters said,
the Lord is risen from the dead!

Minute for Mission

Rachel Truant's voice turns serious as she describes the teens she meets in her role as the Director of Resource Development at the Massey Centre and how COVID-19 is affecting them. "The virus has changed nearly everything in their lives and in the ways we are supporting them," she says.

The Massey Centre in Toronto receives support from Mission & Service and helps pregnant and parenting adolescents, the majority of whom faced major challenges long before pregnancy. "Some have been through foster care, have lived in homeless shelters, are victims of domestic violence, sex trafficking...the list goes on. Usually the pregnancy is another thing that has happened to them in a lifetime of tragic things."

COVID-19 heaps on new challenges. To ensure everyone's safety, the Massey Centre has moved eight young women from the communal supportive residence to private, semi-independent living apartments on the property. Normally, these apartments are reserved for women who have delivered their babies and have obtained life skills through the program. The move has not only created a backlog of young women who want to move in but also means some have moved into independent living before they are ready.

"Every day, we have life skills training courses like how to cook and clean, how to get an apartment, etc. Now, the moms and their babies are living in independent apartments and don't always have the life skills yet to be living there," Truant says, adding that many of the moms are requesting mental health support. "Some are terrified to go to prenatal appointments. Many have lost access to support programs because community resources like counselling services they depended on are shut down. Child support cases can't proceed, so that adds stress. The moms are losing what helps them build a successful life. Plus, some don't have phones or computers, so they feel especially cut off."

Massey Centre staff are working hard to not only keep the women and their babies physically safe but also to relieve emotional strain. Helping young women finish their education is a key part of the Centre's mission. A generous donor has just given them enough computers for everyone, and online courses are in the works to help teach life skills, complete education, and keep the women connected. A virtual group cooking class is in the works.

"We are figuring out what the next steps are. I admit that I'm anxious to come to work, but we can't shut down. Without us, these women would be homeless with their babies. We won't let that happen," says Truant.

Your gifts through Mission & Service mean that young moms and their babies continue to be cared for in these challenging times through organizations like the Massey Centre. Thank you!

Offering Moment

We believe that we are created out of God's love and generosity. These Sundays after Easter are a celebration of how the community of Jesus experienced the living Christ. Christ is risen, indeed! What better way to proclaim Christ alive in your life than to shine your light, for us to share our gifts generously.

Would you be a partner with St Andrew's, with Christ's church by giving of yourself? You can do that in many possible ways:

- Cheque – call Jill Bennett at 705-677-8686 for information on where to send your cheque
- Credit Card or PayPal – St. Andrew's United Church's Canada Helps webpage. Go to our church website at www.st-andrews.ca/church and click on "DONATE"
- and **pray** for us, support us, visit us on our website, YouTube, and Facebook

Thank YOU!

Offering Hymn: MV 191 What Can I Do?

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 and Music: Paul Rumbolt and Michele McCarthy; arr. Alan C. Whitmore, 2005

Words and Music © Paul Rumbolt and Michele McCarthy; arrangement © Alan C. Whitmore

Offering Prayer:

Giver of life, in the same way bread is broken and shared for the benefit of all, so might our offerings of money, time, and giftedness be a breaking open of abundant love to the world. Amen.

Prayers of the Community

I was struck by the fact that the gospel story we heard a few minutes ago, took place on the road, as people were traveling from place to place. Our prayer today is for our own journey times....

God, we will walk with you today. We call upon you in the name of Jesus, our companion for the journey. You come to us as guest, and as friend, and as invitation.

We will walk with faith today. When we encounter doubts and fears, we will not give way to the anxiety of our times. Instead, we will turn to you, for you will be our guidepost, our north star.

We will travel with hope today, and when we come upon despair, we will not pass it by, but we will enter into it gently and fill the empty spaces with your compassion and your healing.

We will journey with love today, carrying your generosity, your courage, your joy with us, and when we come upon all that seeks to break the world apart, we will bring love's power, your grace and your dream for healing.

Help us in these waiting times, to remember again what you want the world to be after this isolation time is over. You are reminding us that we can be a new community, a place where there is room for all, where the least are honoured and the lost ones are cherished.

Heal our hearts, made weary by all this waiting. Come in the beauty of morning dawn. Come in the sound of the phone ringing with someone asking how we are doing. Come and be known to us, in all manner of gentle and beautiful ways this day.

We pray for those who are broken hearted, especially Rhea and Al and their family. We pray for our friends in long term care facilities and for the tenants at St. Andrew's Place. Be their strength and hold them in love. We pray for neighbours, for wellness, for healing.

God, yours is the power, and the glory. We offer our thanks back to you with praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU #595 We Are Pilgrims

We are pilgrims on a journey, fellow travellers on the road;
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

Sister, let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

*Words: Richard Gillard 1977; Music Richard Gillard 1977; arr. Betty Pulkingham
Words and Music © 1977 Scripture in Song*

Blessing:

One: Go forth in the love of God.

All: We will take this love into unlovely parts of the world even while we stay isolated at home.

One: Go forth in the grace of Jesus Christ.

All: We will look for him in the faces of every person we meet, even at a distance, even through social media.

One: Go forth in the peace of the Spirit.

All: We will share this hope with the brokenness all around us, that we might offer healing to everyone.

One: Let us end by praying together the words of our United Church Moderator, The Rev. Richard Bott:

**All: Creator God:
help us to reach out with our hearts
when we can't touch with our hands;
help us to be socially connected,
when we have to be socially distant;
help us to love as perfectly as we can,
knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear." Amen.**

Postlude

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