

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

May 10, 2020 - 5th Sunday of Easter

Welcome to Worship, Easter Sunday
Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, May 10
Email absolute_solutions@live.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Welcome – Brennan Maag

Welcome! Welcome to St Andrew's worship, not physically, but welcome to this virtual space that connects us. Just a couple of words before we begin. First of all, come as you are. That's all our Creator God wants. No perfect offerings, just you coming with an open heart. Take a moment to pay attention to how you're feeling. Take a breath in out. Pay attention to your breathing. Your body with all its parts is a magnificent instrument from God.

Second, we'd like to invite you to join us for Virtual Fellowship Time at 11:30 this Sunday morning – to get your Zoom link to that event, please contact Leslie Cassidy. Her contact information is above, in the NEWS that was emailed on Thursday, and on the Facebook page.

Now let us prepare for worship together.

Lighting of a Memorial Candle

We light a candle to mark the passing of two people, who had deep connections to people in our St. Andrew's community. We prayerfully remember Melvin, the brother of Cecilia Tackaberry, and we remember Greta Clarke. For many years, Greta served the church as a church school teacher, and she was a beloved friend to many in this church. In life, in death, in life beyond death, we know that God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We take a moment to think about, give thanks for the privilege of worshiping land cared for long before settlers arrived here: the Atikemekshing Anishnawbek and the Wahnapiatae First Nation. We worship, you worship on traditional territory of a First Nation. Let us be thankful to the Creator for this wonderful land, and pray one day for just sharing and true reconciliation.

Lighting the Christ Candle

We welcome Holy Presence into this space, yours and mine. Let us connect ourselves, so that we are interconnected within God's Spirit. As we breathe, connect with our deepest selves. Let us connect with one another, with our Creator, with the Living Christ as we light this Candle.

God, fill us with your Spirit now.

Call to Worship

Come and know that God is good!

We come seeking God's shelter.

Come and know God's mercy.

We come seeking wholeness and God's peace.

Come and abide in God's steadfast love.

Receive us as we are, as we come to worship you, O God.

Opening Prayer

Merciful God, our hearts are troubled. We long for a world free of hate and destruction. Sometimes, honestly, we are not prepared to do our part to make this world the way we yearn for it to be. Open our eyes and hearts to your presence now, and in our days to come. In the mind-numbing routines that sometimes make up our days, as we awaken and sleep, as we play and work, as we eat and pray, in moments mundane and profound, may we not just be open to, may we expect wonder and inspiration. We are spiritual "works in progress", Lord, nurture us, your children, and grow us into the builders of your kin-dom vision. We pray this along with 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 1 Let us Build a House

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are
strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace;
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Reading

These are "Beatitudes for a COVID-19 world" by Reverend Mindi, a very relevant paraphrase of the biblical beatitudes.

Blessed are the mask-wearers,
who help prevent passing on of illness.
Blessed are the mask-makers,
who are blessing us with their craft.
Blessed are the ones on the front lines,
who are doing their part to slow the spread,

care for the sick, and provide emergency support.

Blessed are the grocery laborers, the sanitation workers, the hospital janitors—essential workers who make our lives possible.

Blessed are all who stay home.

Blessed are the stressed out, the tired, the anxious, the lonely—
for we are alone together.

Blessed are you when you lose it—
because you are human.

You are loved, and God will see us through.

Bible Reading - 1 Peter 2:2-7, *The Message* translation

The first readers of this epistle seem to have been recent converts to the faith, “newborn infants”. The writer says that if they have a genuine conversion experience then they may enjoy spiritual growth in God’s wholeness. The metaphor used here is living stones God uses to build a “spiritual house” – Christ as the living stone, but, the writer says, Psalms and ancient Bible prophets foretell Christ being rejected – but precious to us.

Clean house! Make a clean sweep of malice and pretense, envy and hurtful talk. You’ve had a taste of God. Now, like infants at the breast, drink deep of God’s pure kindness. Then you’ll grow up mature and whole in God.

Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you’ll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. The Scriptures provide precedent:

Look! I’m setting a stone in Zion,
a cornerstone in the place of honor.
Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation
will never have cause to regret it.

To you who trust him, he’s a Stone to be proud of, but to those who refuse to trust him,
The stone the workmen threw out
is now the chief foundation stone.

Response to the Scripture Reading

Holy Breath, give us your Spirit as we seek understanding of this sacred text that we might be filled with wisdom and courage to live boldly imitating the love and righteousness of Jesus, who we call Friend. Amen.

Message: *What the world throws away, God collects and blesses*



Touring around the modern-day Sea of Galilee in Israel, a tourist will come across sites like the one to the left, Holy Ground stone church. Signs informing you that you are looking at something holy. Well, this one tells us that we are on “a” holy ground; this rock said to be the site where Jesus waited on the beach for his disciples after his death, cooked for them on this rock and assured them that he was not dead, but, in fact

about to be resurrected. Remarkable, isn't it, stones weathering the rigours of time to help tell the stories of tragedy, and celebration?

Whether or not this was the literal site of that event, this stone and sign invite us to think about, reflect. Today's letter from 1st Peter presents two intriguing metaphors – babies in faith, drinking milk, and stones (living stones), rejected by the world, but then used by God to construct God's spiritual house.

Building on these ideas, the writer presents references to Psalms and words of the Prophets all from the Hebrew Bible. It seems that this letter was intended for new followers of Jesus in Asia Minor where the church is expanding, but Gospel isn't yet welcomed. The hearers feel disoriented, and so the letter points them, us, to our Jewish Scripture roots, God's people who themselves felt at times like cast away stones, and had to be reminded that God had a plan in these times of struggle; God is creating something new and wonderful with such stones.

The word for stone that recurs in this passage – Greek "lithos" – is not the same as the word Jesus uses when he tells Peter that he will be the "rock" on which the church is built. The *Living Stones* referred to here are at first discarded, the world has no use for them, but, in God's eyes they... we, are precious.

Metaphors are rich, evocative. They are open to possibility, and encourage us to imagine, and to continually re-imagine our identity and our relationship with God as we navigate our life with its joys and challenges.

Living in exile from our physical connectedness in worship, disconnected from our church sanctuaries; perhaps this is a great opportunity, space if you will, to ground ourselves in *our* ancient Jewish and Christian traditions. People who often felt disconnected, in exile, unappreciated.

Scholar William Loder reflects on this passage, pointing out that God's promise shining through this passage is for a whole community, not just hope for an individual. Loder suggests that,

"the stone imagery invites us... to see ourselves together as not a random pile of ...stones strewn across the landscape of interim territory, but as stones belonging to a structure built on Christ. It is a wonderful image of belonging. It invites us to our own imaginings... Stones are old, young, brittle, strong, shiny... differently shaped and oriented – there's room for everyone."¹

So... who is invited to be part of this all-inclusive Christ community? God needs diverse living stones – different sizes, colours. People who don't at all feel worthy – you are a living stone. You who are still in your pyjamas, clicked on this worship by accident and you don't feel really churchy – God needs you. You are a living stone. You who are in your Sunday best because this routine of worship is very important to you – you are a living stone that God needs as well. Some living stones are well educated, some didn't finish high school.

Doesn't our world need diverse communities where everyone belongs like this passage suggests? A community comprised of humble, authentic, honest people who think that they want to follow Jesus, maybe asking questions. You may not be sure about what you

¹ William Loader, <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/AEpEaster5.htm>. Commentary on 1 Peter 2: 2-10

believe, but maybe you do believe that there is a God out there and we need a God who is up to something and transformative in this world.

We talk a lot at St. Andrew's about connecting with our neighbours, the very vulnerable downtown population – people who have sporadic housing at best, some facing addictions, some who themselves feel disposable. Barbara K. Lundblad recounts an experience of worship hosted by Union Seminary in New York City. A seminary student there worked with a group called *Picture the Homeless* as her thesis project. The student got to know people accustomed to living on the streets.

She planned a service with some of her new friends, a service to remember the hundreds of people who were buried in a particular New York cemetery where many graves had no names. So, the day came for the service; some of the leaders of that service could not read, so they had to memorize their parts. The service was deeply moving, and as it came to a close, each congregant was asked to write the name of a homeless person on a purple Post-it sticky note. A large sheet was stretched out across the front, with names written all over it, randomly, names like “John & Jane Doe”, and “Baby Doe”. Heart wrenching.

After congregants had written on the Post-its (among them were people who lived on the streets, and who knew very well that their friends were in this cemetery), people each brought forward their Post-it notes, and stuck it over top of one of those generic “Baby.. or Jane... or John Doe” names. Funny thing about Post-it sticky notes, they fall off easily. Dawn, one of the leaders in this service, resolved to replace the Post-its as they happened to fall off. Every time a Post-it fell off, she stuck it back on. Time and time, and time again she did this – she did not sit down until every name was in place.

When that sheet was held up to face the congregation, it turned out that the generic names were not at all random – the Post-its spelled out the words: “WE ARE HERE”. God, my friends, is gathering each of us in our uniqueness, our insecurities, our sense of disconnection and uncertainty in these COVID-19 times.

We are all God's community, each of us living stones. We might feel pretty insignificant at times. To God, though, we are told today, to God, all are so very precious. Amen.

Hymn: VU 356 Seek Ye First

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you. Hallelu, hallelujah.

Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and you shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened unto you. Hallelu, hallelujah.

We do not live by bread alone, but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God. Hallelu, hallelujah.

Minute for Mission

This week, we received a thank you card. It contained a beautiful message. It reads:

To the good folks at St. Andrew's United Church;

On behalf of the Board, Management, staff and those we serve, our most sincere appreciation for your ongoing support of our drop in place for our clients. Know that your donations of sandwiches, granola bars, muffins, juice and pizza on Fridays, have been

received with heartfelt gratitude. During these trying times, most of those we serve have little opportunity to isolate, remain safe, and still have access to nourishment and treats. Your generosity gives people hope and acknowledges that people still care.

The letter was sent by Richard Rainville, Executive Director of Réseau Access Network.

Each week, during this pandemic, when most city support services are closed, our church is dropping off food to Réseau Access Network. Thank you for your generous gifts to the Benevolent Fund, which support outreach work to our neighbours in the downtown core. Thanks to you, we are feeding hungry people and showing God's love in real ways.

Offering Moment

What is your immediate response to a generous gesture? It might be gratitude; your skepticism about the world evaporates and you are compelled to show your gratitude somehow.

Well, in the Christian tradition, everything starts with God's abundance. Yours... my blessings – our families, our health whatever state it is, a roof over our heads, some treasure to sustain us. The invitation in Offering time is to take stock of what you and I have, and to share. We all have things to share. Our care for our families, friends, and people we don't know. Our hearts touched, we are inspired to reach out and share. Thank you to those of you who give generously. If you're thinking about it, not sure, that's ok. Pray about it, and remember that the greatest gift you offer the world is the gift that comes from your heart.

THANK YOU SO MUCH for letting God's generosity flow through you.

Offering Hymn: VU 179 Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, hallelujah. Give thanks to the risen Christ,
Hallelujah, hallelujah. Give praise to God's name.

Prayers of the Community

For this prayer, after I say a line, I will pause and you are invited to offer your own words-spoken out loud, or offered to God in the silence of your heart. Let us pray...

Merciful God, who shelters us and guides us, we give you thanks for...

God who comforts, receive those who are fearful and lonely. We name before you...

God whose love is steadfast, be refuge for the ill, the dying, and those who care about them. We offer prayers for...

God of righteousness, we ask for your wisdom as we work and dream that justice will prevail in our community, this nation, your world...

God who seeks our trust, grow us and guide us in your ways that are life-giving in your world...

God, hear these our prayers, spoken in many and varied places, and offered to you, in the Sacred name of Jesus, our way, our truth and our life. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 697 O for a World

O for a world where everyone respects each other's ways,
where love is lived and all is done with justice and with praise.

O for a world where goods are shared and misery relieved,
where truth is spoken, children spared, equality achieved.

O for a world preparing for God's glorious reign of peace,
where time and tears will be no more, and all but love will cease.

Blessing

Day by day, God will lead us:

**to those pools of peace where we can care for our friends
and strangers even from a safe distance.**

Day by day, Jesus will call us:

**to give ourselves in service, to anoint others with hope,
to stay in the safe places for the good of all of God's people.**

Day by day, the Spirit shows us:

**the people we might be, the community we might become
when once again we can gather.**

**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

Call to Worship & Opening Prayer adapted from *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*, Season of Easter.
© 2020 Wood Lake Book Inc.

Beatitudes for a COVID-19 World by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell in her lectionary blog [rev-olution.org](http://revolution.org)

Image used in **Message** is Holy Ground stone church along the Sea of Galilee. Photographer Josh Bizzell.

Blessing by Thom Shuman. © 2020 Thom M. Shuman, <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>

Closing Words written by our Moderator, The Rev. Richard Bott.

All hymns reprinted with permission under One License A-718791. All rights reserved.
