

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
May 17, 2020 6th Sunday of Easter

Welcome to Worship, Easter Sunday
Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, May 17
Email absolute_solutions@live.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Welcome – Jill Bennett

Welcome to St Andrew's virtual worship. Thanks to the wonder of technology, In a time of social distancing, we can connect spiritually. May God fill your space and mine with holy presence. Please 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, is published in our weekly NEWS emailed on Thursdays, and on Facebook page.

Now let us prepare for worship together.

Memorial Candle Lighting

As people of faith, with thanksgiving and love, we light a memorial candle for one of our members, Vivian MacKenzie, who died last Saturday. Vivian had long ties to St. Andrew's from her time with the youth group and Teen Town. When she moved into St. Andrew's Place a few years ago, she began attending worship. Last November, she stood at the front with our newest members, as her transfer from her church in New Sudbury was celebrated. Vivian was outgoing, positive and hopeful; she knew the joy of Christ in her heart. May love surround her family. We hold them in prayer.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We take a moment to give thanks for the privilege of living on this land, land where you are and here where I am, where First Peoples have been stewards for thousands of years. The land where St Andrew's worships is on the traditional territories of the Atikemekshing Anishnawbek and the Wahnapiatae First Nation. We all worship, you and I, on a traditional territory of a First Nation. We give thanks 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

God who made the world and everything in it,
God is Lord of heaven and earth.
God does not live in shrines made of human hands,
God gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.
In God, we live and move and have our being,
And we are God's children.
Come, worship God,
who has been made known to us
In Jesus Christ our Lord.

Opening Prayer:

God of all Creation, out of your being all things were made, yet in all things your wonder and glory cannot be contained. Help us to see you within all things, within all people, but, help us also to

know that you are beyond our understanding, beyond our imagining, from everlasting to everlasting. 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.

Opening Hymn: MV 145 Draw the Circle Wide

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone, standing side by side,
draw the circle wide.

God the still-point of the circle, 'round whom all creation turns;
nothing lost, but held forever, in God's gracious arms.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone, standing side by side,
draw the circle wide.

Let our hearts touch far horizons, so encompass great and small;
let our loving know no borders, faithful to God's call.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone, standing side by side,
draw the circle wide.

Let the dreams we dream be larger, than we've ever dreamed before;
let the dream of Christ be in us, open every door.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone, standing side by side,
draw the circle wide.

Bible Reading - John 14:15-21 *New Revised Standard Version*

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Response to the Bible Reading

Spirit that inspires and sparks life and energy, bless our hearing of these words, that they might infuse our hearts with hope and our minds with wisdom to navigate these challenging times.
Amen.

Message – Come, Holy Spirit



Imagine, visiting a sacred space like this – of course when the pandemic has passed. You journey into St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Behold, the Throne of St Peter. Grand, right?

I know. I know. Some of you would find the bush more sacred. I would too, if I were truly honest. But the architecture, the chair crafted in bronze, and, believe it or not, the stained glass with a soaring dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit is not made of glass, but, in fact is made of alabaster, a stone. ¹

I sauntered into Cathedrals of Europe when I was younger, had time, and felt a sense of wonder, reminded to look up and imagine, especially at times when we tend to look down. But, when we see injustice in our world, we wonder: Isn't this all ... well, a bit... extravagant? The expense of money and artisans' and architects' time and talent; their blood, sweat and tears invested in create such elaborate art.

That symbol of the Holy Spirit, though, reminds us that just because we cannot see it, doesn't mean something marvellous & powerful is not around us.

Today's Bible reading is part of what is called the Farewell Discourse; Jesus talking to his friends over a few chapters immediately after he shares a last supper with them. A poignant moment for teacher and followers, knowing he will soon die, he says: "...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever...whom the world cannot receive...You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." ²

The word that Jesus, according to John, uses here is *Paraclete*, a Greek word that means Advocate, "one who has been called to our side' to stand up for us, to explain us to the court." ³

Jesus has spent some meaningful time with his friends that night after rather emotional passover supper, where the bread and wine they shared became symbols of his ongoing presence with them, even if physically they would be separated. Jesus assures they will never be alone; others may not recognize this Advocate, this Spirit but, "You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

Jesus and his friends abided in one another in life; the life of Jesus and the lives of his friends interwoven. Christ's presence would live on, abiding them, through this Spirit; their lives interwoven so closely that they feel one another's pain, and joy.

This is scary stuff, the more I think about *abiding*. My family, the closest people to me, will tell you that I need space at times. But isn't there something extraordinary to this kind of connectedness? Feeling known, truly known, by someone who is not your life partner. Community encouraged to be interconnected, and to always welcome people into the presence of Spirit and one another. All four Gospels describe an intimacy between Jesus and his friends, that is deep, and strong. The prospect of an end to that relationship *must have terrified the disciples*.

¹ A more elaborate description of St Peter's Throne and the "Dove of the Holy Spirit" window found at <https://stainedglasswindowsblog.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/dove-of-the-holy-spirit/>

² John 14: 16, 17. *New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition*, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission.

³ "Homiletical Perspective", Linda Lee Clader. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide*.

Kind of like the feeling of isolation some among us must feel as we are asked to isolate ourselves from dear friends and family.

At first, going into quarantine might have been stressful, “What will this be like?” We all wondered. But then, now that weeks, months have passed, perhaps a few of us have gone through the grief of a loved one dying, and not being about to Celebrate their life, *we feel all the more isolated*. How will we face this?

Time and again I have heard in the media: *We will get through this together*. Well, in a way, Jesus is saying that very thing today. I will not abandon you!

On May 29 there will be a Zoom presentation by James Walker, who made a trip to Palestine and Israel in a tour called “Youth for Peace.” We will be promoting this on our Facebook page and in our weekly email newsletter, by the way. Youth for Peace was an opportunity for young Canadians to immerse themselves in Palestinian and Israeli culture, to hear differing perspectives. Some of you know that the Holy Land is close to my heart. My job description included being an “accompanier” for Palestinians and Israelis who suffer and struggle non-violently to end the terrible occupation there. Accompanying – coming alongside people, letting them know that they are not alone. Being an advocate too, speaking up when some are made to feel voiceless. The world church is doing that. Well, we are trying to do that, even as we face enormous challenges.

St. Andrew’s and other churches and organizations are partnering with the downtown Mission, the off the street shelter, Réseau Access Network, to bring food and drink to people who face challenges I cannot imagine. Spirit, Paraclete, inspiring real people to accompany one another to create creative responsive communities. Interwoven.

It would be daunting to face our challenges alone. But Jesus is saying to you, and to me – you will not face this alone. Not ... at ... all. We are accompanied by Holy Spirit. It might feel at times like you are alone, but reaching out with ancient times, Jesus is, I think, speaking with fresh relevance in this time and place, saying: This Spirit, this Advocate, is real.

And don’t be surprised, Spirit will descend upon you in the most unpredictable moments too. Like muffins or pizza arriving at the shelter or drop in, at a time when so many who depend on these agencies had come to think that the world doesn’t care about them.

Spirit is right there with you, even if you don’t yet feel it, when you are struggling with your gender identity, or an abusive relationship, or wondering if you will find a way to pay the rent this month. The social distancing we are asked to do only makes us feel more alone. But the Advocate abides in you, and you in that Spirit, and it is right alongside you, right now. Draw on that Spirit for courage to reach out, call someone, ask for help.

Like those frightened disciples facing the loss of their saviour, we all face periods in life when it feels like walking in the valley of shadow. Spirit is waiting to descend on your life, to come alongside you. Looking at that alabaster depiction of the Dove of the Holy Spirit, extravagant as it may seem, reminds people to look up, have courage, Spirit is with us if only we pay attention. Amen.

Note:

Photograph of the Throne of St. Peter and Dove of the Holy Spirit, and more information on it, can be found at <http://stpetersbasilica.info/Altars/Cathedral/Cathedral-Gloria-Chair.jpg>

Hymn: VU 318 Christ Be with Me

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Minute for Mission

At St. Andrew's United Church, we know that we need partnerships throughout our community in order to deliver many of our programs at optimal levels. Through a shared vision and joint efforts with churches, local businesses, the Health Unit, secondary and post-secondary schools and hundreds of volunteers, St. Andrew's has grown the Out of the Cold Friday meal program started by St. Andrew's over 20 years.

This year, because of the pandemic, we had to shut down Out of the Cold on March 13, weeks before what would have been our seasonal finish. One of the volunteers and supporters mentioned to me that the most vulnerable people we serve would benefit from a regular boost to their immune systems thereby helping them to possibly fight off disease of many sorts. Donations of Vitamin C tablets were purchased through the Out of the Cold fund and delivered to the Mission.

Every day, when meals are served, vitamins are offered to the guests and a high percentage of the guests accept them. We have been told how appreciative both guests and staff are to receive these donations as it helps them realize that the community cares. We want them to stay strong and healthy. Many of the guests remarked that they have not been able to afford vitamins nor received them since they were children. When they are offered the supplements, they know that people have their well-being at heart.

Because of your support, we thank you for finding ways such as hosting Out of the Cold dinners, and providing donations to support the purchase of Vitamin C to demonstrate your faith and your care. Thank you for giving and living generously!

Offering Moment

What is the Spirit saying to you today about what your "gifts" are? Christian tradition teaches that we are most generous when giving begins with a sense of gratitude for what God first gave us. That's it, we are most generous when we are first thankful that all we have first came from God – our talents, our personality, our strength, health, our material treasures (whether we think they are large or small in value). All started from God, and Jesus invites us to share what we have generously with our family, our community, church, our world. So, take stock of what your greatest assets are, and how to share them. Maybe you are new to St Andrew's, and you'd like to partner with St Andrew's ministries like the pizza ministry. At the end of this service you will find information to help you to be part of St Andrew's ministries or the larger church work through Mission and Service. For all of you who support St Andrew's in your time, talent, treasure: THANK YOU SO MUCH for sharing God's generosity.

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

God of all, we have gathered here to praise and worship you this day. We have known your power and leading in our lives. We have felt your love surrounding and upholding us. Your Holy Spirit has walked beside us through celebration and grief. In countless ways, big ways and small ways, we are blessed with generous reminders of your presence.

Today, we once again commit ourselves to be a community that shows forth your abiding love to those who have felt abandoned by this world. And so we pray this day:

for those who are grieving, and seeking a new way forward: we pray for Vivian's family.

We pray this day for those who are experiencing housing insecurity, the hunger, all of us who are anxious;

We pray for those with health concerns, that keep them isolated or unable to live into the fullness of joy;

We pray for those who have been forgotten- you know them, God. You hold them in love.

Holy One, we know that the hurts of this world are not what you want for us. We know that you are there, comfort and consolation, even in hard times, especially now. Help us to come alongside each other. Help us be the tangible presence of your Holy Spirit, your hands and feet of love in this world.

So, we make these prayers, God of grace, just as we commit again this day, to share good news, to be the word of hope, as we celebrate all the ways you are with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to you. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 670 Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Precious Lord, take my hand, let me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near,
when my life is almost gone,
hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When the darkness appears, and the night draws near,
and the day is past and gone,
at the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Blessing

Go from this place, speaking of what God has done.

We will remind everyone that, despite everything, God loves us.

Go from this place, singing of what God is doing.

**We will rejoice that God has not left us orphaned,
but makes us one with everyone around us.**

Go from this place, imagining what God will do.

**We will witness to that hope which seems to distant,
yet is as close to us as our hearts.**

**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: Created by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, rev-o-lution.org. Adapted from Acts 17:24-25, 28.

Opening Prayer: *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Easter Season. © 2020 Wood Lake Books Inc.

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Blessing: Thom Shuman. © 2017 Thom M. Shuman, <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>

Closing Words: Offered by our Moderator, The Rev. Richard Bott.

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