

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

May 24, 2020 - 7th Sunday of Easter

Welcome to Worship, Easter Sunday
Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 11:30 a.m. on May 24
Email absolute_solutions@live.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Welcome – Anne Pile

Welcome to the worship service of St. Andrew's United Church, In Sudbury Ontario. In this challenging time of social distancing, we can stay connected; God's Spirit touching us, each of us, and joining us together, the Body of Christ. Please join us also 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.

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

Of course, we believe that God's Spirit is already here. There is an intentionality about worship, that we welcome the Holy into our spaces – so I invite you to take a moment...Open your heart, your mind, to the work that God can do today. Are you ready for what God wants to do with your life? Mine? It starts by truly inhabiting your body, this vessel entrusted to you. Breathe deeply. The Biblical word for Spirit shares the same root as the word for air. God's Spirit hovered and created in the Genesis creation story. Jesus breathed on his disciples as he appeared to, alive, after crucifixion. He said to them, "Peace." And, he breathed on them. As you breathe, feel God's Spirit breathe new life into you. God **[light candle]** fill us with your Spirit now.

Call to Worship

Come to worship, people of God, with praises on your lips.

**Even when we are feeling isolated and fearful,
we can glorify the One who holds our hands in our loneliness.**

Come into the presence of the One who makes every place, every space, holy and sacred.

**Even where we continue to stay safe in our homes,
the doors of grace are flung wide open for us.**

Come and hear the stories of the One who loves you.

**In living rooms, on laptops and devices,
we will sing our songs and tell those tales
of the peace and of the hope which is ours.**

Opening Prayer

Keeper of all time, you are enthroned on the rubble of death's shattered power, calling us this morning among the faithful of all times and places to your side. Thank you for offering us again a fresh sense of vocation with which to serve the broken communities in which we live. Captivate us, energize us with wonder in this worship and send us out into a world often lulled into spiritual sleep in these challenging times. All this we pray 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: VU 402 **We Are One**, vs. 1,2, 4

We are one as we come, as we come, joyful to be here,
in the praise on our lips there's a sense that God is near.
We are one as sing, as we seek, we are found;
and we come needful of God's grace as we meet, together in this place.

We are one, as we share, as we share brokenness and fear,
in the touch of a hand there's a sense that God is here.
We are one as care, as we heal, we are healed;
and we share warmth in God's embrace as we pray together in this place.

We are one, as we hear, as we hear, heart and hand unite;
in the word we receive there's sense that God is light.
We are one as we leave, as we love, we are loved;
and we seek justice in God's ways as we move together from this place.

Bible Readings – Psalm 68 (VU p. 787)

Sing praises to God's holy name;
make a highway for the One who rides the clouds;
be joyful and exult in God's presence.

Guardian of orphans, protector of widows,
O God, in your holy dwelling,
you give the lonely a home in which to live;
you lead the prisoners out to prosperity;
but the rebels must live in a wasteland.

When you went out at the head of your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,
the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain
before you, God of Sinai, God of Israel.

You sent down a generous rain;
you refreshed your heritage when it languished.
There your people found a home,
which in your goodness you provided for the poor.

Blessed are you, God of Israel.
Blessed are you.

Acts 1:6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Response to the Readings

The Word is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.

May we be given grace to experience that Word in faith and love.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Thanks be to God.

Message – “Where is Your Focus?”

He was gone. Jesus, that is. He was the focus for his friends of their passion to learn and grow. He was their inspiration, their... everything. Now gone. Just like that the story echoes much earlier story from the Hebrew Bible where elder prophet Elijah imparts some final words of wisdom to his protégé Elisha, then in a wondrous spectacle, a chariot of fire carries him up into the heavens; don't the truly great stories have fire coming from the heavens? Elijah was gone.

Spectacular moments... then, quiet.

Dawn is breaking around me right now, and there is quiet in the air. A beauty, but also an aloneness. That can be unnerving. But then I listen, and I hear the soundscape of Creation. I am not alone. We are not alone at all. But it depends on where our focus is directed.

The aloneness of those disciples in today's story, eyes drawn upward toward the empty sky – their grief is an experience I think we all can connect with. Sometime in our lives we have felt left behind, lost, alone.

My first years away from my childhood home to attend university, they made me feel alone, at times. Gone were the comforting, familiar voices of my family, The sounds of home like work in the kitchen, conversations. I wanted to just hide away in my room. In fact, each transition in my life has tempted me to focus my eyes away from my present reality, life and God's opportunities beckoning me – with all their possibility, and challenge.

Think of the different changes you have experienced in your life – creating a sense of home, then moving from it. Job changes in your life, or, coping with the limbo time in between jobs. In those moments of feeling uprooted, alone, even lost, we can tend to gaze nostalgically back towards what was. It's difficult in those times to open your eyes and heart towards your present reality. Reality is often not very comfortable.

Like our family camping vacations where we bring the tent. I dream of the comforts of home the entire car ride to wherever we will be camping. But then, once we've planted ourselves, our tent, organized our gear, I can get out into the bush. When I pay attention with ears and heart tuned in, if I'm open to connecting, I inevitably feel the sacredness of it all.

I'm outside today as I ponder the message of Jesus' ascension. Jesus suddenly drawn upward; the tone of the story suggests a sense of surprise at this moment. Followers of Jesus jolted from how wonderful it must have been to speak with Jesus. Even those rather terse words he gave them when they wanted to know when God's kin-dom was going to come. Jesus responded, “Even the Son of Man doesn't know that day.” These interactions with Jesus must have been so lovely for them. Miraculous, even, considering just a few weeks ago he was hanging on a cross. In the blink of an eye, change can come.

Here, I have left the relative safety of my makeshift basement rec room studio. At home I can control my surrounding, all my things set up just so as we record worship. Here, I have no idea how this is going to go. I'm resonating with those disciples... looking up.

The storyteller, the writer of the Gospel of Luke who also writes a sequel in the Book of Acts, describes angelic figures suddenly jolting the upward-looking disciples into reality.

Why do you look up? He is gone to be with God. You must go now. Stop looking up - look at one another, and pay attention to what God has called you to do now. Focus on here, now, on caring, and building a community that lives out the spirit of love that Jesus has taught you.

Right here, in this little portion of Creation, when I pay attention, when I connect with it, touch... listen... feel ... and respond ... grief subsides. The lost feeling ebbs and flows. It doesn't go away. Nor will the collective malaise we all feel at times within the rhythms defined so much by pandemic-normal living.

But maybe we can all take a lesson from this story in the book of Acts; when we try to refocus our attention from our day-to-day sameness in our routines, our isolation, when we try to find every opportunity to connect – connect with people by calling someone, or getting involved with something online that connects us with causes, with caring for people, with actions that our hearts lead us to.

Sometimes intentionally shifting our focus from comfortable nostalgia, or looking up (avoiding the here-and-now reality). Maybe we will connect with our mission. Yes, I said *mission*; that Whoever or Whatever it is that your Creator has put you on this earth to be and do.

I've heard people who could feel sorry for themselves, stuck in an apartment or home because they are particularly vulnerable to catching the coronavirus, I hear stories daily about how they call people whom they know are suffering more than they are. People are turning to social media, particularly the pages where people make a plea for themselves or others. I notice that often someone is responding quickly with a wholehearted offer to help – to get groceries, donate furniture for an empty apartment.

I hear often the refrain from Scripture I learned as a child:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.¹

The writer of Luke focuses on Jesus, but in writing the book of Acts that same storyteller shifts our attention to focus on the people who had to cope with grief in losing Jesus; living in limbo, really. This moment of Jesus Ascending into the heavens and disappearing is where the rubber hits the road. Followers now have to live those values of loving unconditionally, and sharing with generosity. The community refocuses their gaze from up to out. We are invited daily to practice that exercise too. Intentionally shifting our focus from escape and limbo mode, to connecting with your heart and spirit and engaging the world.

I'm going to listen now as I finish. Strange as this is for me, I'm going to experience it. Listening... watching... being thankful for this. And, thankfulness shifts my focus to my present reality too. How can you shift your focus from the malaise of pandemic life to living gratefully, generously... Reaching out. Giving. Sharing. That is the focus of the Book of Acts. Faithful and generous living in a chaotic world. Amen.

Hymn: VU 642 Be Thou My Vision, vs. 1, 2, 5

Be thou my vision, O joy of my heart;
naught be all else to me save that thou art,
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, my calm in all strife;
I ever with thee, and thou in my life;
thou loving parent, thy child may I be,
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

¹ Hebrews chapter 13, verse 2. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission.

Great God of heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Minute for Mission – “Giving is Contagious”

Do you happen to remember an old television commercial for shampoo? A friend told her friend, and this friend in turn, told two other friends, and so on, and so on, and so on... until everybody had heard that the secret to having beautiful hair was to use a certain shampoo.

The same is true with our Muffin Outreach project.

It started out with one person having the idea to provide late night snacks to the guests at the mission. Since 30 guests, on average, come every night, and they are open 7 nights a week, that meant we needed 21 dozen muffins for the Shelter. One person told our Reaching Out committee at church.

The first Monday, 5 weeks ago now, we delivered 21 dozen muffins to the shelter.

The next week, a call came from the Shelter staff, telling us that the people they service were arriving very hungry, because almost all the support services are closed, and staff wondered if we could double the order to 40 dozen muffins. Word went out to the church and on week two, 40 dozen muffins were delivered.

By week 3, two other churches had joined in and offered to help. The circle widened. Now, in addition to taking muffins to the shelter, we began to offer food to the Reseau Access Network, and their drop in place on the edge of Memorial Park. On week four, the Sudbury Teachers Lions Club showed up with an offer to help. Last week, week five, the Girl Guides of Canada came on board.

So, this past Monday, we dropped off 100 dozen homemade muffins, made by a team of about 40 bakers and gathered by four delivery people.

We are thinking that God is using this amazing story to remind us, especially now, that people want to help their neighbours. When food is offered, people remain stronger. Coronavirus has less chance coming to a compromised population, because people who live on the streets are being fed by all those bakers; they are getting a good night's sleep at the shelter; and they find support and friendship through Reseau-Access and the drop in centre. The wider community is concerned for their well-being.

What we are learning is that giving is contagious. When one person sees their neighbour offering kindness in the form of food, then the story spreads, and so on and so on and so on.

On behalf of the St. Andrew's United Church reaching out team, thank you for widening your heart and living the gospel message of hope.

Offering Moment

Hearing about those first followers of Jesus, moved to do ministry. What do you think? Is it possible that God is equipping us today, modern-day disciples? I believe that. I believe that planted in you and I, are enormous gifts, some that we already share, but many of those gifts – whether talents you have, your ability to build people up, lead, or your sense of service – compel you to act out of care. Your treasures to share. All these gifts, Jesus says, the Spirit inspires us to share. So, what are you going to share today from among your treasure trove of gifts that God has planted in you? If you already support St. Andrew's, thank you so much. If you haven't, yet, prayerfully consider. We love having partners, and would be happy to answer questions you might have if you send us an email, or go to our Facebook page, or subscribe to our weekly email Newsletter, creatively called the NEWS to find out what we are up to. Thank you for all that you do out of love, my friends.

Offering Hymn: VU 179 Hallelujah, Hallelujah (refrain)

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

Prayers of the Community

Holy God, glorify us, that we might glorify you. It is not for ego that we have chosen to follow your way. Instead, we have heard stories. We have seen examples of such extravagant love, and we want to live like that as well. We see the freedom and the strength that living faithfully brings. We learn that there is another story, not the pressure to live a certain way, or work relentlessly. But following Jesus means living into the promise that we are enough, as we are, for God loves us first, and has called us to be bearers of the kin-dom. We do that in simple ways: by sharing daily bread; seeking forgiveness for self and for others; believing in God's dream of hope and justice for all people.

In your mercy, God of love, help us to show forth your glory this week. Help us to seek out and lift up your presence wherever and however we might find it. Remind us that our work is for you. Help us to look to you, not just in clouds and light and heavenly splendour, but among the places that need the showering of blessing, and among those who are most hurt by the brokenness of this world. Today, we offer a prayer for our community partners, the guests who eat lunch at the Mission, and take a shower at the Samaritan Centre, and come for conversation to Réseau Access Network, and find food and hope at Better Beginnings. We pray that you will increase and deepen our partnerships with other churches.

We also hold in prayer the ones we love – families far away, friends we long to visit, shut-in members of our church family. Be with these loved ones now... Holy God, thine is the kin-dom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 213 Rejoice, the Lord is King, vs. 1, 2, 4

Rejoice the Lord is King! Your risen Lord adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing and triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice:
rejoice; again I say, rejoice!

Jesus the Saviour reigns, the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our sins, he took his seat above.
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice:
rejoice; again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope, for Christ, the judge shall come
to glorify the saints for their eternal home.
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice!

Blessing

Go out from this place full of the tenderness of Jesus' care for each one of us. Go out into the world, carrying with you the abundance of God's grace and love, and letting it overflow as blessings to the world. Go; for Christ is out in the world, still calling us to life and love. May the grace of Christ Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you, today and always. Will you say with me the prayer that we have made our practice during this time of physical isolation, a prayer given us by our Moderator, Richard Bott:

**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." Alleluia! Amen.

Postlude

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Closing Words: Written by our Moderator, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott.

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