

## ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

July 12, 2020, 6<sup>th</sup> After Pentecost

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Fellowship Time at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, July 12

Email [catherine@st-andrews.ca](mailto:catherine@st-andrews.ca) to get the Zoom link.

### Prelude

#### Welcome – Greeter: Genevieve Gibbons

Welcome to worship as we journey on in these warm days, continuing to keep a physical distance. Wherever you join us from, near or far, be assured that we are knitted together by God's Spirit. Each of us unique, yet all of us loved, children of God.

This is the second week of shared summer worship, shared by St. Mark's, St. Peter's, and St. Andrew's United Churches. We at St. Andrew's are privileged to lead this worship today, and are thankful to have you join us.

Next week is Pride Week in Sudbury, and we will be enthusiastically leading the worship on behalf of the downtown churches for Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup> – celebrating the beauty and diversity of God's love. St. Peter's United Church will take over leading share summer worship on July 26<sup>th</sup>.

Now let us prepare for worship together.

#### Acknowledging Traditional Territory

Long before settlers came to this land we call Canada, many First Nations lived on the land, cared for it. We, here at St. Andrew's United Church, worship on the traditional territories both of the Wahnapiatae First Nation and the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. Whose traditional territory are you worshipping on today? We recognize the long history of our First Nations and Métis peoples in Ontario; we give thanks for their stewardship of the land throughout the ages. Let us, all of us, Treaty people, commit ourselves anew to the work of healing, justice and reconciliation.

#### Lighting the Christ Candle

This candle dances with the pieces of the Spirit, reminding us of the warmth of community into which God calls us. We might be separated physically, but the wonder of this flame signifying Spirit and the presence of Christ is that we connected, one body, one Spirit. We light this candle that shines with wisdom, insight, and clarity for us as we worship.

#### Call to Worship

How wonderful it is when people live together in peace and harmony.

**It is as refreshing as running under the sprinkler in summer.**

It is as special as being baptized and anointed as one of God's children.

**It is as refreshing as wiggling our toes on a dew-covered hillside.**

It is as if God has blessed us for life now and life forever.

**Thanks be to God. Let us worship!**

#### Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit, blow through the doors of the spaces where we are worshipping today. Holy Spirit, blow through the doors of our hearts! Where the dust of the years covers the joy of God's love, blow it away! Where the shutters are nailed and keeping us from experiencing the sunrise, blow them open! Where life has burned us, burdened us, broken us, breathe into these bones that we might live, Christ's people again! This we pray, as we also 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: VU 371 *Open My Eyes***

Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me;  
place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear;  
and while my wave-notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere;  
open my heart and let me prepare love with thy children thus to share.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

**Bible Readings**

**Psalm 119: 105-112 (NRSV)**

The first reading is taken from Psalm 119, a song of faith that might speak to those of us who particularly feel life's trials and tribulations weighing on us...

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.

I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word. Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your ordinances.

I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.

Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.

I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

**Matthew 13:1-9**

A reading from the Gospel according to the storyteller Matthew, various verses from chapter 13.

...Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"...

## Response

Gardener God, prepare our hearts for these Words that challenge and nourish, may we become fertile soil. Plant in us the seeds of justice and courageous faith that we might be your helpers to usher into our world your wonderfully-yet-baffling vision. Amen.

## Message: “It’s about the Soil” - Jesus

I have two ailing plants in my office, and my colleague, Catherine knows that there is a reason. I am not a gardener. I don’t notice those poor things enough. I yearn to. I’m a work in progress.

One commentary this week points out that how we plant seeds is important to gardening, but, perhaps more important to gardening is the state of the soil.<sup>1</sup>

It is so easy to focus attention on that sower, throwing seeds with abandon every which way. No seed research and development done in advance. No thought given to where the seed is tossed. Just enthusiastically scattering – most intriguing to watch. If you are a farmer or gardener, you might call this irresponsible. Terrible stewardship! Look at them throwing away most of those seeds.

Modern Bible scholars tell us that at the heart of this passage is generosity – a Creator who is not risk averse. No, indeed, this is a God who is extravagant, and wants us, made in the holy image, to emulate that extravagance.

I think that this passage, today, in COVID-19 times, speaks to us about being generous and non-judgmental – both about how we give and to whom we share what we have. But, to be generous, we also need to *experience* God’s grace. *It is about the soil* – about how receptive our hearts and minds are to love of God and love and care of others.

When we are starving, literally or metaphorically, we are not particularly inclined to be very generous. We need to tend to our own spiritual lives, our soil, before we can care for others. Jesus’ parables are, by definition, open-ended – that is, they invite each of us to determine the meaning, and figure out how we connect. So, what is the Spirit saying to you today through this Bible image, of sower scattering seeds, generously casting those seeds near and far? Could the seeds represent “grace”, God’s love for you just because you are, well you. Could those seeds be of forgiveness offered to you, even when you can’t let yourself off the hook. Maybe those seeds are surprising gifts, no particular reason, you didn’t earn it, just a welcome joy in a tough time.

On this balmy summer morning, we might reflect on the question: Would we notice if a seed came our way?

Catherine tells me that my plants in my office require attention. It’s about the watering, the pruning, but it’s also about the soil. These can be challenging times to care for our spiritual soil. It doesn’t happen on its own. It takes work, intentionality, tending to our spiritual life. So do you tend to your spiritual life, your *soil*?

For me, I was in a pretty good rhythm before the pandemic. Exercise, being intentional about family time for me. But then COVID hit, and things closed. We have been living in our homes for months now. I’m going to confess that the deeper I delved into this seed and spiritual soil image, the more I realized: I have some work to do. I’m willing to bet that you do too.

The Holy Seed Sower invites you and me to pay attention to how we are doing... really. These are unusual times. Isolating times. Days are long and sometimes our emotions are frayed. We are not

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 by Holly Hearon, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org) July 12, 2020.

feeling very generous. Quite the opposite, we can focus inward. I think that many in the world are needing connection, a sense of hope for something different in days full of sameness.

There is a wonderful book about preparing your soil for seed. It is called *An Altar in the World*<sup>2</sup> by Barbara Brown-Taylor. In it she tells wonderful stories about how she found holy wonder in the most mundane aspects of her life.

We have very kind friends, the Emirys, who have a dairy farm. Keith has a busy routine, as dairy farmers do, that starts early. But in the quiet moments between chores, he walks around with his cell phone, takes spectacular photos, of bugs, flowers, spiders, but all revealing remarkable detail. The colours, the textures. I think that this is one way that Keith tends his spiritual soil.

We have seen polarity in our world, and most recently hearing bad news stories as our finance people are taking stock of the impact COVID-19 has had on our economy. What aspect of life can you pay attention to today that will reveal wonder, surprise? How can you remind yourself daily of the truth we find in faith, that this world we live in is truly full of miracles? The wonder that my 9-year-old son who exhibits, just as he did as a 3-year-old, kneeling down looking so carefully. He still squeals when he holds a slimy frog. I roll my eyes.

Years ago I was privileged to know Jake, a smart, careful youth, who had in his short life gone through so much tragedy, life on the streets of Kingston, surviving as a sex trade worker he was fighting an addiction to cocaine. He was part of a program that paid young people to get healthy, to find stability and possibly a job. Jake's joy was building little *kalimbas*<sup>3</sup> from Zimbabwe. He even sold a few. But he absolutely loved to play them. He drove us crazy, but this practice, creating, playing connected him with joy.

In these challenging times, how do you tend to your soil in life? The Holy Gardener is scattering seeds indiscriminately as I speak – experiences, moments of wonder coming your way. Maybe we can then share that generosity, that joy, by encouraging a member of our family, a friend, even a less familiar neighbour whom we know weighed down by worry – encouraging them to tend their soil, to be aware of wonder all around them too. Amen.

### **Hymn: MV 154 *Deep in Our Hearts***

Deep in our hearts there is a common vision;  
deep in our hearts there is a common song;  
deep in our hearts there is a common story,  
telling Creation that we are one.

Deep in our hearts there is a common purpose;  
deep in our hearts there is a common goal;  
deep in our hearts there is a sacred message,  
justice and peace in harmony.

Deep in our hearts there is a common vision;  
deep in our hearts there is a common song;  
deep in our hearts there is a common story,  
telling Creation that we are one.

### **Offering Moment**

What a privilege we have to share in God's mission, here at St. Andrew's, you and I and many dedicated volunteers. Adapting to the challenges of COVID-19, reaching out in care with muffins and juice and pizza, and partnering the agencies that care for the most vulnerable. We are not at

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<sup>2</sup> *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*. Barbara Brown Taylor. Harper Collins, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Kalimba (Mbira), for more information go to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mbira>

all paralyzed by a pandemic, you and I, as we each contribute our time, talent and our financial treasures too – we are doing God’s work.

If you already contribute your time, your treasures towards the many ministries of St Andrew’s and to Mission & Service – THANK YOU. If you are still thinking about being a part God’s work here, may you be blessed in your prayerful pondering. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. Send us an email ([church@st-andrews.ca](mailto:church@st-andrews.ca)) or call us at 705-674-0721 and we will be happy to answer your questions. Ask to be added to our weekly Newsletter email list.

We live out Christ’s resurrection story every day now. God’s strange and wonderful vision unfolding in and around us all the time...Let us lead with our sense of thankfulness and give generously, one gesture at a time. Thank you God, for the privilege of being a part of your unconditionally loving, justice-making, peace-building work. Amen.

**Offering Hymn: VU 540 *Grant Us, God, the Grace***

Grant us, God, the grace of giving, with a spirit large and free,  
that ourselves and all our living we may offer faithfully.

**Prayers of the Community**

God of each one, God of all, we hold in prayer the people we name as family, by birth or adoption or marriage. We pray that the members of our families will know the power of your care, the abundance of your love, and the strength and wisdom each one needs to live well through these days.

We pray for our friends and neighbours, those with whom we are drawn together by ties of laughter, and shared purpose, by learning, and common dreams, by your kin-dom values. Strengthen the ties between us, and may we find in our relationships, the freedom and companionship-along with community – that nurtures us and the world.

We pray for our fellow citizens, those with whom we are drawn together by birthplace and nation, by regional ties and traditions. Fashion these bonds so to ensure the relationships and ideals we claim are paid more than lip-service, so that who we are and have been never closes us to who we may yet become. We pray for those who are part of this community and in the whole Christian Church, those with whom we are drawn together by a common faith and uncommon grace. Together, may we thrive in ministry, expand our vision, deepen spirituality, and may we grow closer to one another, just as we long to grow close to you.

Free us to recognize the stranger as sister, as brother, and to see the joy and need of any person as the cause for our rejoicing and compassion. God, hear our prayers this day in the name of Jesus, who gives us a good path to walk, and leads us to speak words of generosity. It is in His light that we are invited to live your love and abundance in every encounter we have along the way. God hear your prayers, and in your love, answer. Amen.

**Closing Hymn: VU 274 *Your Hand, O God, Has Guided***

Your hand, O God, has guided your flock from age to age;  
the wondrous tale is written, full clear, on every page.  
Our forebears owned your goodness, and we their deeds record;  
and both to this bear witness: one church, one faith, one Lord.

And we, shall we be faithless? Shall hearts fail, hands hang down?  
Shall we evade the conflict and cast away our crown?  
Not so: in God’s deep counsels some better thing is stored;  
we will maintain, unflinching: one church, one faith, one Lord.

Your mercy will not fail us, nor leave your work undone;  
with your right hand to help us, the victory shall be won;  
and then, by earth and heaven, your name shall be adored,  
and this shall be our anthem: one church, one faith, one Lord.

### **Blessing**

Go forth as God's people.

**We will sow seeds of love and joy in the world.**

Go forth as Christ's true friends.

**We will sow seeds of justice and hope in oppression-strewn paths.**

Go forth as the Spirit's love.

**We will sow seeds of peace and reconciliation in every corner of creation.**

As we go now from our various places, each of our spaces made holy by the God-presence, let us again remind ourselves that we go together in Christ's Love, let us again say together our United Church Moderator's blessing:

**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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**Much of this service is from *Gathering 2020, Pentecost 1: Lighting the Christ Candle* by Peter Chynoweth, page 33. **Call to Worship** by Bill Steadman, page 35. **Opening Prayer** by Richard Bott, page 36. All used with permission.**

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**Blessing:** © 2017 Thom M. Shuman found at <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/2017/07>

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

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