

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
July 19, 2020, Celebrating Sudbury Pride / Fierté

Prelude

Welcome – Greeter: Jill Bennett

Welcome to worship.

This is the third week of shared summer worship, shared by St. Mark's, St. Peter's and St. Andrew's United Churches in downtown Sudbury. This worship also comes at the end of an unusual Sudbury Pride Week.

If you are joining us for the first time, a special welcome to you. Welcome also to our regular community who gather to pray, to hear stories of inspiration and hope, and to be reminded that though we are keeping physically distanced, God's love binds us together.

Today we are privileged to have Richard Rainville with us today to offer something from his journey. Next week, St. Peter's will lead the first of three shared Sunday worship services and we will post on Facebook the link to those services on the St. Peter's United Church YouTube channel.

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 Candle of Hope

Once there is light,
there are no longer deep shadows.

Once there is hope,
there is no longer deep despair.

Once there is justice,
there can no longer be complete oppression.

Once there is peace grounded in justice,
there cannot be war. [candle is lit]

Once there is affirmation
there can no longer be utter condemnation.

Once there is acceptance,
there cannot be unhindered discrimination.

Once there is celebration
God's kin-dom vision for our world might be realized. May it be so, and be forever.

Call to Worship

All you who delight in sacred moments, both strange and ordinary, come and worship our God, the One who has created all people in diversity and beauty.

Thanks be to God who blesses the peculiar and rejoices in the uniqueness of every body and being.

The Holy takes on flesh in every gender and sexual orientation, every race and ability, every body size and body type.

Each embodied difference is a unique glimpse of Holy Wonder.

Blessed are those who search for God among the lives of the oppressed, the betrayed, the turned-away, and the condemned.

Blessed are those who receive with joy the gifts of God enfleshed among us.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray: God, when you called each of us into being, you delighted in your works. You gifted us with differences that illuminate the breadth of beauty, wisdom, and practices of love in your creation. In whatever ways we still struggle to accept and celebrate our own unique offerings, free us from narrow thinking that confines, constrains, or condemns your good work in us. We also pray the prayer that Jesus taught us...

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 297 All Praise to You

All praise to you, O God of all creation:
you made the world, and it is yours alone.
The planet earth you spun in its location
amid the stars adorning heaven's dome.
We lease the earth but for a life's duration,
yet for this life it is our cherished home.

To tend the earth is our entrusted duty,
for earth is ours to use and not abuse.
O gracious God, true source of all resources,
forgive our greed that wields destruction's sword.
Then let us serve as wise and faithful stewards
while earth gives glory to creation's Lord.

Bible Readings

Psalm 139: 1-4, 9-12

The first reading is taken from Psalm 139, a song of faith that might speak to those of us who particularly feel life's trials and tribulations weighing on us...

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely...

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Genesis 28:10-19

The reading that will focus our Message today comes from the Hebrew Bible story of Jacob. He has swindled and survived all his life, but in this passage, he finds out that he is not alone, this dream marks the beginning of a journey of self-discovery and peace for him.

Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran. He came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground and it reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it.

Then GOD was right before him, saying, “I am GOD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I’m giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as the dust of the Earth; they’ll stretch from west to east and from north to south. All the families of the Earth will bless themselves in you and your descendants. Yes. I’ll stay with you, I’ll protect you wherever you go, and I’ll bring you back to this very ground. I’ll stick with you until I’ve done everything I promised you.”

Jacob woke up from his sleep. He said, “GOD is in this place—truly. And I didn’t even know it!” He was terrified. He whispered in awe, “Incredible. Wonderful. Holy. This is God’s House. This is the Gate of Heaven.”

Jacob was up first thing in the morning. He took the stone he had used for his pillow and stood it up as a memorial pillar and poured oil over it. He christened the place Bethel (God’s House).

Response

God of mystery, you speak to us in stories and metaphors. It could be easy to shrug them off as just a story, but at the heart of them are messages for living courageously, faithfully, and often in counter-cultural ways. Give us clarity as we ponder these scriptures, baffling and wonderful. Give us the heart to feel, the mind to reflect, and the will to act with integrity. Amen.

Message: *Spirit of Pride* by Rev. Dave Le Grand and Richard Rainville

Rev. Dave:

Jacob was a schemer, a swindler of his own brother which polarized his childhood family. His life was a struggle, and so no surprise that he ultimately earns the name “Israel” in the Bible¹, meaning *one who wrestles with God*.

So he has this mysterious dream of a stairway running between heaven and earth, an experience of holy mystery that is both awe-inspiring and intimate. One scholar points out that while different Bible translations describe God’s proximity to Jacob differently as he is experiencing the dream, the New Revised Standard Version says that:

God stands “beside him” ... as [Jacob] lies on the ground, promising to be with him wherever he goes: “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” (verse 15).²

Dreams and visions come to us at times, help us to see things from a different perspective – perhaps seeing the world, in its beauty and also the world’s oppressive systems, more clearly.

We all know of the courageous visionary Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He audaciously speaks God’s dream in his book, appropriately entitled *God Has a Dream*; God says:

‘I have a dream,’ ... ‘Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter,

¹ Genesis chapter 32, verse 28, <https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=461884672>

² Commentary on Genesis 28: 10-19a, July 20, 2014, Esther M. Menn. www.workingpreacher.org

joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing...

In God's family, there are no outsiders. All are insiders. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Palestinian and Israeli...³

After a lifetime of scheming, Jacob's patterns of thinking and acting are impacted by God's vision – his swindling ways giving way to a focus on reconciliation, particularly with his brother Esau whom he had wronged.

Catherine and I asked Richard Rainville from Réseau ACCESS Network Sudbury if he would dare to dream a bit himself, even as he and Réseau staff walk with people facing challenges that I cannot imagine – addiction as well as a whole host of health issues.

Richard, will you share your vision of transformation for our modern Faith Community?

Richard Rainville:

Good morning, my name is Richard Rainville. For over thirty-one years I've been employed by Réseau ACCESS Network, and for the last twenty-one years I've been the Executive Director working with a very dedicated team. Together we provide services to, and work with individuals who are most often marginalized. People who are poorly housed, if at all; People struggling with issues of mental health; People who use substances and/or inject drugs; People who work within the sex trade; People who are part of the two-spirited lesbian gay bisexual transgendered queer and questioning communities; People who struggle with gender identity or sexual orientation. We work with People.

When I'm not working, I share a home with my loving husband Robert and our two fur-kids Miss Olivia and Miss Scarlett. We share our life and good fortune with close friends and family as well as our Church community at St. Peter's United.

I will be 62 this coming fall. I often reflect on my personal journey and recognize that in some ways I had it easier than most gay people from that era. I was able to "come out" at the early age of 18 and still be supported by my immediate family. Living the secret would still be necessary to protect myself from unwanted comments, personal and physical attacks, loss of employment, loss of friendship and other issues which most people need not concern themselves with.

If you indulge me for a few minutes, I'd like to try a short meditation, one that might give you insight as to what many from the 2S-LGBTQ communities experience.

Imagine if you will yourself as a child, growing up in a loving family with two parents and a number of siblings. Your parents however are of the same gender. This is the norm. All of your friends and neighbours have similar households to yours. You, your siblings and friends are at the age when you are discovering your sexualities. Your siblings and friends make comments about same gender individuals they see on tv, in classrooms or on the streets. You try to connect in that way, but you have feelings for individuals of the opposite gender. You're not sure what to do with these feelings, and fear you have no one to talk to about them. You hear negative comments from friends and family members making fun of people who seem to like others from their opposite gender. You don't want to be called those names, so you keep your feelings a secret. When pressed you pretend to like someone of the same gender, but it isn't real. You don't really have feelings for them in that way.

³ GOD HAS A DREAM, *A Vision of Hope for Our Time* Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams. ©2004 Doubleday.

As you get older, you meet someone who identifies as having the same secret. They too have strong emotional and romantic feelings for the someone of the opposite gender. At last! You're not alone, and all of those feelings that made you think you were going crazy fade away. While you and they start secretly seeing each other, you realize in order for this relationship to be realized, the secret must be maintained. No one should ever find out about it for fear they might harm your relationship, so you continue to see each other in secret.

One day, while at work, a colleague says "Hey, aren't you a friend of so-and-so? I hear they were in an accident, badly hurt and taken to the hospital by ambulance". You're in shock. You question what to do. You know the hospital will only let you see your beloved if you disclose your relationship, but what will that do to the level of care they might receive? Will they be discriminated against in one form or another? And what about your job if work finds out? And your friends and family, what will they think....

I remember using a longer version of this meditation in the late eighties, early ninties. You'd think this wouldn't be an issue any longer, but for many it still is.... I recently saw a quote on Facebook that seems relevant here: "Queer people don't grow up as ourselves, we grow up playing a version of ourselves that sacrifices authenticity to minimise humiliation and prejudice. The massive task of our adult lives is to unpick which parts of ourselves are truly us and which parts we've created to protect us".

When St. Peter's Church made the decision to examine whether to become an Affirming Congregation it was met with skepticism. "Why do we need to become affirming when we are already welcoming to all" some folks asked. Welcoming yes, however having a heterosexist view doesn't recognize the privilege this view entails. It doesn't acknowledge the struggles many of us have experienced and continue to experience as members of the 2S-LGBTQ+ communities.

As members of Church, if the goal is to be as welcoming as we can be, a better understanding of experiences, struggles and milestones need to be heard. You may never understand completely, but your helping voices amplifying ours is what's needed as Allies.

Thank you.

Rev. Dave:

Thank you, Richard. Archbishop Tutu says that God is continually inviting us to be partners in actualizing God's radical dream for our community and world.

We are invited to see with new eyes that God is transforming our churches, whether we see it or not. God is beside us, beside also the courageous children, teens, adults who yearn to be accepted for who they are. The church should be the very place that speaks of God's inclusive dream that includes all people, diverse in gender orientation, age, ethnicity.

Spirit of Pride celebrates the beauty of every person, including those who are 2-spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning and all of us who are allies – all of us children of God, called together as the spectrum of colours join in one rainbow.

Drawing the Circle Wide – A Pledge

Let us gather in holy peace
peace that is the preparation for justice.

Imaginative Spirit, who stirs within us passions and compassions,
remind us that it is you who have formed us.

Great rainbow of creation, we seek your justice.
it is our responsibility to end hate, intolerance, discrimination, and violence.

May we hear with healed ears and hearts
that all of us are beautiful and unique beings, formed in the womb of the universe, blessed by our diversity and affirmed by holy authority.

We remember
those who have suffered violence.

We remember
our responsibility to name violence.

We remember
that all are called to end violence.

We remember
that all are called to justice and to peace.

We pledge to one another that we will let the light of the Divine burn brightly in each of us.

We pledge that we will accept our power as children of Divine love.

We pledge to share with all of Creation the gift that is each one of us.

We pledge to embrace the mystery wrapped up in our identity, our sexuality, and in the wonder you planted in each of us.

Hymn: VU 267 *Like a Mighty River Flowing*

Like a mighty river flowing, like a flower in beauty growing,
far beyond all human knowing is the perfect peace of God.

Like the summer breezes playing, like the tall trees softly swaying,
like the lips of silent praying is the perfect peace of God.

Like the azure ocean swelling, like the jewel all excelling,
far beyond our human telling is the perfect peace of God.

Minute for Mission: *Hope Under the Rainbow*

From 2013 to 2015, Rachel Hearn was a camp counsellor at Welcome Friends' Rainbow Camp for LGBTQ Two-Spirit and allied youth ages 12 to 17. To say the least, it was a life-altering experience. Every August there existed a tiny, week-long place of sanctuary that said, "We do see you, and you are welcome here." That is exactly what Rainbow Camp is all about.

"Rainbow Camp is a place of radical resistance against the oppressive forces of heteronormativity and cis-normativity that exist across the world today," says Rachel. It is like other summer camps, but the learning is focused around sexual health, healthy relationships, understanding our identities, and figuring out how to work around a society that is not designed to enable queer people to thrive. Even though there is no marching or petitions, the world is still changed for every camper who finds a friend or feels like themselves for the first time.

"At Rainbow Camp, we changed the world for young people by giving them the tools and skills they needed to flourish. If you create a space where people can be open about who they are and accept others doing the same, you will learn what it means to love and to trust."

Rainbow Camp's ministry is made possible because of Mission & Service.

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

Offering Moment

Since its beginning, the church was meant to be a place of chosen family—a community of outcasts and outlaws, dreamers, prophets, and humble disciples of Love. In the company of Divine Presence, we create belonging and nurture justice.

With grateful hearts, I invite you to join me, all of us, to share our gifts, whether it is our time and our passion shared, or it might be our monetary treasures given to an important cause. I encourage you to connect with your sense of thankfulness, and give generously, make a difference.

St. Mark's, St. Peter's and St. Andrew's are all a part of these summer worship services. I would invite you to find us online; our websites and our Facebook pages will have information about how you can contribute towards the important work we are all doing to transform this world.

Let's make a difference for justice and love in this world together. If you are considering contributing – maybe it's your time or treasure – to the work of one of the churches, we encourage you to find the contact information for St. Peter's, St. Mark's and St. Andrew's United Churches.

Will you pray with me...

God who loves all your children, we thank you for your diversity of messengers from Jacob and Esau to Mary and Miriam in our Bible tradition. But also, our modern-day messengers of courageous truth and love, from prophets within church and outside our church who helped us to understand that Christ is enfleshed in a wide variety of gender experiences. In gratitude, we offer you a heartfelt "thank you" for all the gifts shared in love. 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

On this new day, a day of your making, we give you thanks and praise, God, for all the ways your Spirit is inviting us to share good news. We hear your spirit, sounding as music on the streets; as conversation between neighbours who have the chance to catch up and visit after so much time apart; we hear your spirit in laughter that invites us to smile and rejoice in your blessing. We see your spirit in quiet ways, serving ways, in caring ways, in love that knows no bounds. We feel your spirit inviting us to take a deep breath, breathing in the newness of living that you dream for your people.

We thank you that light is shining in darkened places, especially now, for those on the margins, for those who have had to hide their sexuality and deny their personhood. We thank you that hope, and new vision continue to grow in the world. We thank you for a call today, to take on this life with courage, to speak up when we see wrong, to stand beside as allies and friends in the cause of justice for all people.

Some of us are still trembling, still forced to keep silence. Some of us feel threatened, or we believe that ours is the only way, and that we must threaten. Renew your dream of justice and peace for all people, between all people. Give us the strength and courage we need to look deep within. May we take this quiet moment and examine ourselves, searching for the ways we have not been loving, the times we have not spoken up. We pray that you will give our best intentions voice, that we will speak out in the name of Love, on behalf of all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We pause and remember- those who are scared, those who are alone, those who have had bad news this week, those of us who are feeling impatient with the ways we now have to live.... God, hear our prayers and in your love, answer....

And now, Love, fill us with courage. And now, Christ, send us out into this new day with a message of hope. And now, Spirit, give us gentleness and a dream to follow. We make these prayers in the name of the One who is our Way and our Life. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 229 *God of the Sparrow*

God of the sparrow, God of the whale, God of the swirling stars.
How does the creature say Awe? How does the creature say Praise?

God of the rainbow, God of the cross, God of the empty grave.
How does the creature say Grace? How does the creature say Thanks?

God of the ages, God near at hand, God of the loving heart.
How do your children say Joy? How do your children say Home?

Blessing

Let us go from here to proclaim the good news:

that God takes on flesh in the strange and surprising. Love liberates from the margins. Together, we have what we need to resist evil and oppression.

With a renewed commitment to solidarity with all of God's beloved children, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Ally and Asexual, and two-spirited people, **may the Spirit lead us from this place with peace.**

Even as we are still caring for one another by remaining physically distanced from one another, we affirm our collective faith that God's Spirit binds us. Will you again say with me the blessing created 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." Amen.**

Postlude

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