

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

July 5, 2020, 5th After Pentecost

Welcome to Worship, 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, July 5

Email absolute_solutions@live.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Welcome – Greeter: Brennan Maag

Happy Belated Canada Day, and welcome to the worship service of St. Andrew's United Church here in Sudbury Ontario. On a summer morning, we welcome you. In this strange time impacted by a pandemic, we celebrate yet another birthday of our Country. As we give thanks for this nation, and for those who formed this confederation, we remember the harm caused to the Indigenous peoples of this land. We give thanks that we are not alone as we work towards healing. Our heroine today, Rebekah, reminds us that our Creator invites us all to be part of changing our world, we just need courage and faith to answer that call.

Would you like to join us for Online Fellowship Time at 11:30 this coming Sunday morning? To get your Zoom link that you click onto to join us, please contact Leslie Cassidy - her contact information is above.

Now let us prepare for worship together.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

Long before settlers came to this land we call Canada, many nations of people already lived on the land, cared for it. We recognize them as the First Nations, and we also acknowledge that as proud as we are of Canada, we know that European nations and churches caused great harm to our Indigenous peoples, all in the name of Jesus. Today, here at St. Andrew's, we are worshipping 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

The Spirit moves where you and I are, right now. It is the very breath that gives us life... be aware of the holy now. As we prepare for worship, take a breath and notice how the air fills you, nurtures you, regenerates you. Each moment is a miracle. You, are a miracle, a gift. What opportunities lay ahead in your journey? Today's worship invites you to wonder, to reflect, to give thanks. Let us give thanks as we light this Christ Candle: Thank you, Holiness in even the smallest most mundane moments, thank you for the gift of life, the gift of each of us, and may you open up for us new possibilities at every turn wherever our journeys take us. **[light candle]**

Call to Worship

Come to our God, all who hunger for life:

for it is God who nourishes us at the Table of Grace.

Come to our God, all who are worn out by life:

for it is God who provides the rest we need.

Come to our God, all who are weighed down:

for it is our God who carries our burdens with us.

Opening Prayer

Eternal God: you sing a song of silence to our noisy hearts, inviting us to still our fidgeting souls, and find our peace in your cupped hands which cradle us.

Jesus, Wanderer of the kin-dom: you are called to reveal God to us and do so in the tenderness of your touch, the gentleness of your words, the peace of your shared yoke.

Spirit of Rest: your childlike presence opens our eyes to the wonders of the world. As we hand you our anger, our hurt, our sin, may our burdens become our songs of joy. As we gather our hearts at the well that overflows with refreshing grace, we pray together 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 89 *Love is the Touch*

Love is the touch of intangible joy;
love is the force that no fear can destroy;
love is the goodness we gladly applaud:
God is where love is, for love is of God.

Love is the lilt in a lingering voice;
love is the hope that can make us rejoice;
love is the cure for the frightened and flawed:
God is where love is, for love is of God.

Love is the Maker and Spirit and Son;
love is the kingdom their will has begun;
love is the path which the saints all have trod:
God is where love is, for love is of God.

Bible Reading

Rebekah's Story – Based on Genesis 24:34–38; 42–49; 58–67

Was it rebelliousness or obedience? I don't know, but I do know I needed to follow the call in my heart. To go to the well; to satisfy my curiosity about the stranger who was there that day. His presence was just intriguing, and I needed to know why.

I soon found out.

I saw him in the distance as I walked to the well – a tired stranger in the middle of his prayers. I had hoped he would finish by the time I approached the well, but he was not. Quietly I went down to draw water so as to not disturb him. As I came up, he asked me for a drink.

He was dirty from hard travel. I could see the weariness in him. Of course, I gave him a drink. As he sipped, I saw his caravan – 10 thirsty camels. He was clearly tired from his journey, and his camels needed water, too. I admit I was also curious about this stranger. Why had he come so far and in such haste? I offered to bring water to his camels, thinking maybe this would give me time to find out more.

God knows how to draw us in. God called me, from the deepest places within me and sent me to that well. God placed the desire in my heart so that I would volunteer myself for this hard task and carry all that water to those camels. I was an answer to Eliezer's prayer. I had no idea. I thought I was just out there helping a stranger while answering to my own curiosity.

Instead of a simple thank you, Eliezer presented me with valuable jewellery and then began worshipping God. I didn't know what to say. Then he told me of his need for a place to stay. I went home and reported what had happened at the well. This puzzle made no sense, yet all the pieces were clicking into place.

At home, I heard him tell the story of Abraham's faithfulness, of Sarah's death, of far-off lands, of distant relatives. Then, it snapped into focus. This is where I was being led. I won't lie, I was afraid. I knew nothing about where I was going or the people who I was going to. I didn't know if my betrothed was a good man and I would have nowhere to go if he wasn't. What I did know was from the character of his servant, his representative, Eliezer – that if he were any reflection of my future family, I would be okay.

I heard them talking the next morning, my mother, my brother and Eliezer. I heard them making plans for me. I heard the trembling in my mother's voice and her hope that I could stay just a little while longer. I knew I needed courage to do it – courage enough for my mother and myself, so when they asked me, "I will go," was all I could say. Anything more and my voice might have cracked.

And then we left.

I prayed and prayed for what was to come. That he would be a good man. That I would be welcomed as well as Eliezer tells me I will be. After so much long travel I saw him in the distance. My heart told me this was Isaac before anyone introduced us. I slipped my veil over my face as I knew I should. So much of what had happened was so far outside the bounds of what I expected of my life, the least I could do was cling to my veil – some threads of the familiar as I met this new family of mine. I was welcomed. I was loved.

Response

Let us pray... Source of Life, open our hearts and minds to holy opportunities. Grant us the faith and courage to accept. Amen.

Message: Discernment: Seeking that Holy Window

Steeped in so much tradition, and patriarchy. That was my first thought as I read again this story of Rebekah, and struggled with a servant sent out on behalf of a master to find a wife for the master's son. The customs of ancient times baffle me. It seems like young Rebekah is part of an unsettling transaction.

But this is not a financial transaction – rather, more a spiritual one. Does that settle better for me?

God is placed at the centre of this encounter. Outside our hearing, but part of the larger story, old patriarch Abraham sends his servant Eliezer off on a Mission. Typical in ancient stories, aging parents Abraham & Sarah are concerned that their son Isaac does not have a life partner. They want to secure a legacy to carry on through the generations.

Eliezer rather comedically works out a sign with God as he approaches the outskirts of the town of Nahor and parks the camels and gear near a well. He is thirsty from the journey, so Eliezer says to God: *God, I will ask a woman that I meet, "please give me a little water from your jar to drink." When it is the right woman for Isaac, God, make her respond, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also."*

So, God is guiding, but there sure seems to be a lot of coaching from this servant! This brings to mind the danger in our modern Christian prayer life to project our desires onto God – claiming that it is God's way.

These powerful, but often perplexing Bible stories, can raise many questions for moderns like you and me. Can finding God's wisdom – not just our human yearnings – in the midst of everyday living happen like this:

- When we seek a partner in life?
- When we hope to find a job that will be fulfilling?
- When resolving a problem that has paralyzed us?
- And, how about picking the right investments on the stock market?

I think that whatever we believe, we come to worship seeking something – whether comfort, wisdom or inspiration. I hope that we do not seek an echo chamber within which we just want our own thoughts about life to be confirmed!

At the heart of this story from the Hebrew Bible is the importance of keeping a mindfulness about God, whatever you or I understand God to be, at the centre of a major decision in life. One thing I observe in this story from Genesis is that all the main players of this story – old worried Abraham, servant Eliezer, and even Rebekah – all these characters rely on discernment.

“Discernment”, a big word used in many different ways, but common to the theological understandings. We can apply discernment to our everyday lives. Principles like: stepping away from the fray of life, listening, praying; balancing our rational thinking with being in tune with the heart; and, in discernment, drawing wisdom from others, a community, especially when we are making significant decisions in life.

Discernment: Stepping back and listening for God's voice, listening to what reason tells us as well our heart, and making big decisions within a circle of wise people.

Praying with Torrin recently here, watching him inaugurate his own discernment of ministry and life, I was reminded my own discernment process 30 years ago. I needed good discernment because I didn't see ministry in my future at all! I particularly needed a community of people who knew me, whom I respected as wise and faithful people around me, to begin hearing God's invitation to me that was previously drowned out by the din of life.

To be quite honest, I don't think our world has patience for this pace of intentionality. We can make some major decisions very quickly, mindlessly. Think of major decision you made under pressure. How did it feel? Where is the opportunity in times of stress for God's still small voice, or sage advice of others to sink in?

Discernment is essential to many Biblical stories, and to our lives. Think about Jesus in that poignant moment at Gethsemane: Jesus asking his Abba – intimately referring to God as his dad – asking for this cup of suffering to be taken from him. Jesus knows, discerns, at that moment what needs to happen. Often holy wisdom is very different, even counter to, our wisdom.

In the original Bible story, Rebekah's family asks Eliezer to leave Rebekah with them for 10 days. Pressed for time, they still insist that they must speak with her. Rebekah's circle created space for her to discern. A very small window in everyday life that we can squeeze out for discerning Holy Wisdom – but, I'm suggesting, and I believe that Bible time again confirms it – God's voice waits for us in those small windows that we create.

This week, your homework, your mission if you accept it, is to create space for quiet reflection, talking to God before making big decisions. Where is it that you create that quiet? Where do feel calm? I create space when I'm buying things. Since I learned that buying Fair Trade products makes lives better for people who picked or produced the products I consume, it has become my practice to take time to think before I buy. I research the product when I have time, or I just notice the label, where it was made. I wonder about the people at the sometime far other end of the

production chain. I pray for them, and for the ability to discern what products to buy. That is not just ethics, for me it is faith. Loving especially my neighbour whom I cannot see.

Discernment: being open to that window in our busy lives helps us to hear holy wisdom and to make faithful decisions. Open us, God. Open us. Amen.

Hymn: MV 158 *Dream a Dream*

Dream a dream, a hopeful dream, as children do on Christmas Eve,
imaginings, surprising things to hold and to believe.

Dream a time, this Christmas time, when no one's hungry or afraid;
that weapons go and harvests grow, that friends are met and made.

Dream a peace, the Christmas gift that changes everything we see:
the shimmering of angel wing, the Child, the Mystery.

Minute for Mission: "Unique Teachers, Unique Students"

Many of the Plains, Dakota, and Nakota peoples have a sacred connection to the horse. For them, the horse holds immense cultural and spiritual significance, and its energy is a powerful catalyst for change.

The spirit of the horse was certainly present among Indigenous youth from Plains Presbytery in Saskatchewan Conference during the equine-assisted learning (EAL) program at Cartier Farms in Spruce Home, Saskatchewan, a Healing Fund project that's also supported by Mission & Service. Ten young men participated in the week-long leadership program in July 2018. The tools and strategies the EAL facilitators and Traditional Knowledge Keepers used would help the young men grow into strong Indigenous adults.

By interacting with these incredible animals, the young men brought innovation, strength, and energy to everything they did at the farm. Despite the injustices that Indigenous youth face every day, the skills these young people took home helped them understand their place in the circle of life and equipped them with the inner resources to strengthen it.

The EAL program acknowledges the need to support young people as they deal with difficulties in life stemming from systemic racism and intergenerational trauma. For Indigenous youth, the trauma from colonial oppression continues to reverberate powerfully in their lives and circumstances. The impact from the Indian residential school system and other colonial practices is still felt today. The EAL program is a place for Indigenous youth to begin their healing.

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

Are you ready to respond to God's invitation to follow, to serve, to give be a transformative force? As I invite people to give each week, it is not just about money. Money is an important way to symbolize our faith and gratitude, but the most profound giving we can do is of ourselves. Committing our hearts, our minds, our talents and passions toward creating a new order that is of God. God's ways are frankly strange to this world. Those things that people say are "just the way it is", well, God's vision that needs our participation and commitment flips all of those givens in the world upside down. Our giving must start with gratitude. A simple humble thank you for all that we are, all that we have – saying, "Thank you God." Then we lead with our hearts as we give.

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) 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.

Thank you for all that you do out of love. God, here, today we offer our heart and mind and talent to your work that in faith we know changes the world. Thank you. 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 healing, God of life, we pray for those in our circles this morning, who are thirsting for cool water, be it the water of a good relationship, or the refreshing taste of welcome, or the quenching feeling of knowing that we stood with the most vulnerable and spoke up with words of justice. We pray for the blessings of rest and time to simply be still, and know you, God. Hear our prayer, that you will turn our vision outward, beyond the ordinary, and grant us a widening sense of connection and love.

This day, we pray for all who are struggling with choices between good and evil, choices about beginnings or the endings of commitments, choices whose doors do not yet reveal the vista beyond; choices about what to do with a tough situation, and what to do for the sake of others.

In the silence of prayer, we seek your wisdom, your healing and comfort, your strength in trying times, your joy in shared times, your wisdom and love in all times. God, hear the prayers of our hearts, and in your love, answer. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 378 *Spirit of God, Descend*

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;
stoop to my weakness, strength to me impart,
and make me love you as I ought to love.

I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,
no sudden rending of the veil of clay,
no angel visitant, no opening skies,
but take the dimness of my soul away.

Teach me to love you as your angels love,
one holy passion filling all my frame,
the baptism of the heaven-descended dove,
my heart the altar and your love the flame.

Blessing

We leave with the presence of the Holy,
so we may show others the way to grace and hope.

We leave with Jesus, who draws living water for us,
**so we can share it in the heat of summer,
and in the bitterness of winter.**

We leave with the Spirit, who teaches us how to listen,
**so we may hear the cries of the lonely
and the voices of all who are ignored.**

Again, recognizing the mystery of our connectedness in God's Spirit, let us say together the words of blessing given us by United Church 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

Call to Worship, Opening Prayer, and Blessing: © 2017 Thom M. Shuman found at
<http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com>

Reading – “Rebekah’s Story“: From *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Pentecost 1. © 2020 Wood Lake Books Inc.

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