

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
December 6, 2020 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

Welcome to Worship

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 7:00 p.m.
Email sketchingalong4@gmail.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Hymn: MV 12 *Come Touch Our Hearts*

1. Come touch our hearts that we may know compassion,
from failing embers build a blazing fire;
love strong enough to overturn injustice; to seek a world more gracious,
come touch and bless our hearts.
2. Come touch our souls that we may know and love you,
your quiet presence all our fears dispel;
create a space for spirit to grow in us, let life and beauty fill us,
come touch and bless our souls.
3. Come touch our minds and teach us how to reason,
set free our thoughts to wonder and to dream;
help us to open doors of understanding, to welcome truth and wisdom,
come touch and bless our minds.
4. Come touch us in the moments we are fragile,
and in our weakness your great strength reveal;
that we may rise to follow and to serve, steady now our nerve,
come touch and bless our wills.
5. Come touch us now, this people who are gathered,
to break the bread and share the cup of peace;
that we may love you with our heart, our soul,
our mind, our strength, our all,
come touch us with your grace.

Welcome

Welcome – both people in sanctuary and those at home joining worship **LIVE** through our video.

Those at home, if you are new here, note that our contact information is at the end of the video, and you might want to visit our website or Facebook page, or email our office manager so you can receive our weekly e-newsletter called the NEWS. We also have a Virtual Fellowship time tonight at 7:00.

Now we take time, create space for the holy in our hearts – breathe gently, noticing how you are filled with life-giving oxygen. Let us worship.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

This morning we offer our gratitude for the land we are worshipping on. We acknowledge that these lands have been cared for and inhabited by many First Nations people from time immemorial to the present. We gather as a treaty people of Robinson-Huron. We acknowledge the Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek and Wahnapiatae First Nation, who along with Métis people, have called this territory “home”. We give thanks for the current and historic contributions these and other Indigenous peoples continue to make and we pray that we may live in peace and friendship, honouring the treaties, seeking justice and walking together in the spirit of reconciliation. Amen.

Lighting the Christ Candle

This is holy space, whether the sanctuary is St. Andrew's or in your home, we connect in liminal space that transcends distance or time. We are together.

Christ light shines from the inside out – shines through us, to illuminate hope in our world.

Call to Worship & Advent Candle Lighting - PEACE

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to God.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Advent 2 Candle-Lighting – Betty McFarlane & Freda Wilson

It is the second Sunday of Advent, the second Sunday of this waiting season. Last week, we spoke about hope. (*light the first candle*)

Peace is the theme of this day.

What does peace look like?

Peace looks like a child playing safely in a place where battle tanks once rumbled and bombs fell. Peace looks like a Palestinian farmer tending his olive grove without worrying that the trees will be bulldozed to make room for another illegal settlement. Peace looks like a frail veteran who paid the price to spare us the horrors of war. Peace looks like one of our Canadian forces personnel spending Christmas far from home to keep people safe.

Peace looks like a family, gathering for the first time after a huge fight, trying to repair the ties that bind.

What does peace feel like?

That's not easy for us to answer, in a country where for most of us war feels distant. Peace feels like being set free from chaos or fear, like being enveloped by a flower-filled field after feeling isolated in your home. Peace feels like being able to be who you are without being judged or targeted. Peace feels like a pleasant holiday meal where everyone gets along.

Peace feels refreshing, like the rivers of justice rolling down from God's holy mountain.

What is it like to live in peace?

Peace looks for the common ground. Peace believes that we humans are more alike than we are different, refusing to rush to judgment; peace tries to see beyond the rumours and the lies. Peace always seeks justice and fairness and the dignity of all people.

As we await the coming of the Prince of Peace, we light the candle named Peace.

May its light help us find our way. (*light the second candle.*)

Opening Prayer: MV 220 Peace Shines as the Solitary Star

Peace shines as the solitary star.

Faith is the inner light.

You and I together mirror the Light of Lights,
and illumine the pathway home.

Hymn: MV 173 Put Peace into Each Other's Hands, vs. 1

1. Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle flame,
with tenderness enfold it.

Time up Front

I have with me things that made me smile this past week. As I read the focus Scripture from Isaiah for today, Comfort O Comfort my people – they are in a tough place. They are waiting. I bet those ancient children of God have no more patience than we do. Waiting is tough, especially if things are not going well for you as you wait! These are two stuffy toys (picture of two toys) that date back to when my kids were very, very small. They have kept them. These have been squeezed, and stepped on, slept on, but bring me comfort as my kids grow up. The story of my life, as yours continues. We hopefully live expectantly, maybe anxiously, uncertain of what is around the corner. The grass may wither... the snow will come, it will melt, but God's Word, God's unceasing Love, will remain steadfast. Amen.

Hymn: MV 173 Put Peace into Each Other's Hands, vs. 5

5. Reach out in friendship, stay with faith,
in touch with those around you.
Put peace into each other's hands;
the Peace that sought and found you.

Scripture Readings (Genevieve Gibbons)

Mark 1:1-8 (The Message)

As I read this passage from the Gospel of Mark, imagine if John the Baptizer were called to be the new minister of worship at St. Andrew's United Church. This is "The Message" translation.

The good news of Jesus Christ—the Message!—begins here, following to the letter the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Watch closely: I'm sending my preacher ahead of you;
He'll make the road smooth for you.
Thunder in the desert!
Prepare for God's arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!

John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey. As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out."

Isaiah 40:1-13 (Contemporary English Version)

This passage marks a turning point in the book of Isaiah. Prophecies before this moment have been calls to repentance with clear demonstrations of the consequences for peoples' desire for power, status, and wealth more than a desire for a relationship with God. The word "Comfort!" rings out with tremendous power - from the depths, from our grief and despair, we are called back into relationship with a God who never abandons us.

Our God has said:

"Encourage my people! Give them comfort. Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce: Your slavery is past; your punishment is over.

I, the Lord, made you pay double for your sins.”

Someone is shouting:

“Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God. Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground. Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!”

Someone told me to shout, and I asked, “What should I shout?”

We humans are merely grass, and we last no longer than wild flowers. At the Lord’s command, flowers and grass disappear, and so do we. Flowers and grass fade away, but what our God has said will never change.

There is good news for the city of Zion.
Shout it as loud as you can from the highest mountain.

Don’t be afraid to shout to the towns of Judah, “Your God is here!” ...
The Lord cares for his nation, just as shepherds care for their flocks.
God carries the lambs in loving arms, while gently leading the mother sheep.

Response Prayer

Gracious God, in this season of gifts and giving, help us to accept with joy the great gift of sacred scripture. As we unwrap the readings for today, bless us in our receiving of the wisdom of our ancestors in faith. Amen.

Message: *Peace Needs Vigilance*

Not available at time of printing.

Offering Moment

This Advent journey invites us to reflect on where we have been – it sure has been a memorable year, hasn’t it... And, where this journey leads – to God-with-us, Emmanuel – born in an animal feeding trough. Where has God been along our journey, are you welcoming of something holy being born anew in you? Our faith journey offers us the opportunity to reflect regularly on where and how our Creator has blessed us. And in response, extravagantly, we as journeyers with Jesus are invited to give generously of ourselves, our talents, our treasures, to transform our world. Today as we offer our gifts, ourselves, our treasures given from our very hearts, I invite you to hold out your hands, join me in dedicating these gifts and the greatest gift of ourselves.

Let us pray: We offer our gifts, both tangible and spiritual, to level the ground and make smooth the way ahead. We prepare, not just for our individual relationships with you, Love Incarnate, but for the blessing of all of your Creation. We offer ourselves, our minds, and our hearts to reveal your presence, your healing, your Love, to all. Amen.

Communion Hymn: VU 1 *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, vv. 1 and 4*

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lowly exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

4. O come, O Rod of Jesse’s stem,
from every foe deliver them
that trust your mighty power to save,
and give them victory o’er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Sacrament of Communion

As we come to this table,
we are reminded that this is the table of Jesus Christ,
a banquet prepared for everyone.
All who seek to be nourished and sustained
in the journey of faith,
all who seek wholeness and compassionate paths to peace and justice,
are welcome here.

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift our hearts in prayer.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

Let us pray:

Blessed are you, Breath of peace, Giver of all life,
Source of love that knows no boundaries.

Your song of wisdom rang out before the world began;
throughout the ages, your song of liberation has impregnated us with your hope for a world
where:

those considered last and least are first and most;
violence is overcome by the power of your ancient love; and,
all siblings work together for peace.

You bring our longings to birth,
and send prophets to awaken us
to your approaching Advent among us.

We thank you for those who, like Mary,
have the strength and courage
to give birth to your love in the world;
for those who, like the shepherds,
dare to seek out the Child of Bethlehem;
for those who, like the wise ones,
actively challenge violent and oppressive powers.

We praise you that your everlasting light is shown to us
in womb and tomb,
in cradle and cross,
in tenderness and compassion.

We join in the Advent prayer of all your people,
“O come, Emmanuel.”

And, as we wait and watch for your coming among us,
we proclaim your goodness.

Sanctus: VU 1 O Come, O Come Emmanuel, vv. 6, 7

6. O come, O Dayspring, from on high,
and cheer us by your drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

7. O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
O bid our sad divisions cease,
and be for us the Prince of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

At this time, we also remember all with whom you would have us share your feast...

Prayers of the Community

Merciful God,
speak comfort to us.

We are waiting...
For situations to change.
For diagnoses.
For treatments to work.
For the start of a new life.
For the end of suffering.
For peace to come into this world.

We are waiting for the one who cries in the wilderness.
We are waiting for the Messiah – for God-with-us to enter this world.
Sometimes it seems the waiting will never end.
Sometimes it seems that we are stuck in this season of our lives:
that the mountains are too high,
the valleys too low,
the road too rough and winding.
We fear that we cannot move forward.

Merciful God,
speak comfort to us.
Not in the red and green and of shop windows and clichéd Christmas clothing,
but in the blues and purples of Advent waiting.
In the colours that shift the nighttime of our souls to reveal a brilliant dawn.
Speak tenderly to us,
in our fear and our pain,
remind us that you stay with us no matter how much we might turn away.
Call us not merely to wait,
but to prepare for the ways that you will enter anew into our lives.
Help us to redefine our situations;
to see the smooth, level path into your presence,
rather than the peaks and valleys of our human lives.

Merciful God,
speak comfort to us.
For you are here: our God, our shepherd.
You are here, holding righteousness and peace,
steadfast love and faithfulness.
You are here,
and from this time of waiting and preparation,
your glory shall be revealed, even to mere mortals.

You are here, and even we shall know peace, through your nurture and care. We hold in our prayers.... (names from prayer list). We remember those who seek a peaceful place to rest

tonight. We pray for those who grieve, and as a country we remember the victims of violence, women who died in Montreal, families who remember them....

Merciful God,
speak comfort to us.
We are waiting and preparing for you.
Amen.

At this time, we remember Jesus,
Who on the night before he died,
took a loaf of bread,
gave you thanks, broke it, and said,
"Take and eat; whenever you do this, remember me."
Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, saying,
"This is the new covenant; remember me."

Gracious God, Breath of peace, Source of love,
we pray for your Spirit.

Make us, while many, one.
Make us, though broken, whole.
Make us, despite death, alive.
And so we pray:
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

And so we join with our siblings around the world in the prayer of Jesus:

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.

Sharing the Bread & Cup

The body of Christ,
the bread of life.

The lifeblood of Christ,
the cup of blessing.

Let us eat and drink together
for our strengthening in the faith,
and for the sake of the world.

Communion is Served

Prayer After Communion

We thank you, God,
for breaking into our world
and pouring into our lives and our experiences.

We thank you, God,
for this meal of thanksgiving
and the stories of love, grace, and hope that it tells. Amen.

Hymn: VU 64 *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. For Christ is born of Mary; and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.

3. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessed gift of heaven.
No ear may hear his coming; but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4. O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

Commissioning

Peace be with you.

And also with you.

Righteousness be in you, Comfort be among you,
Faithfulness be around you.

Let us go out into the world reminded that God is steadfast.

In our living, may we shine with God's glory.

We journey now, waiting for the birth of God's peace.

Advent Benediction: Love Your Neighbour Song

You gotta love your neighbour who doesn't look like you.
You gotta love your neighbour who doesn't think like you.
You gotta love your neighbour who doesn't love like you.
Loving your neighbour is what you gotta do.

You gotta love your neighbour who doesn't speak like you.
You gotta love your neighbour who doesn't pray like you.
You gotta love your neighbour who doesn't vote like you.
Loving your neighbour is what you gotta do.
No exceptions! (*spoken*)

Postlude

Call to Worship adapted from John Moses, "What does it look like?" *Gathering*, Advent/Christmas 2020, pages 68-70.

Isaiah 40:1-13 reading from the Contemporary English Version (CEV). © 1995 by American Bible Society.

Response Prayer written by Susan Ivany. *Gathering*, Advent 2020, page 32. Used with permission.

Prayers of the Community and **Commissioning** adapted from *Seasons of the Spirit*, Fusion (Advent B). Wood Lake Books Inc.

Communion Liturgy written by Alydia Smith, Program Coordinator, Worship, Music, and Spirituality, General Council Office.

Prayer during Communion inspired by "Blessed are you, gracious God..." by William Kervin and Lillia Perigoe in *Celebrate God's Presence*, page 276. Used with permission.
