

WORSHIP AT ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

October 31, 2021

Discipleship is Stewardship – Stewardship 1, Gratitude

Welcome to Worship

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time Sunday at 7:00 p.m.

Email sketchingalong4@gmail.com to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Opening Hymn: MV 48 I Can Feel You Near Me God

1. I can feel you near me God. I can feel you near.
Yes, I know you're with me God. I feel you here.
I can feel you near me God. I can feel you near.
Yes, I know you're with me God. Heaven is here.

And I'll jump for joy. I'm singing Alleluia.
Jump for joy for you.
I will jump for joy. I'm singing Alleluia.
Jump for joy for you.

2. I can feel you loving me. Yes, I know you care.
God, I know you're loving me always, everywhere.
I can feel you loving me. Yes, I know you care.
God, I know you're loving me. I know you're there.

And I'll jump for joy. I'm singing Alleluia.
Jump for joy for you.
I will jump for joy. I'm singing Alleluia.
Jump for joy for you.

Welcome & Announcements

Welcome to St. Andrew's United Church in downtown Sudbury Ontario.

We begin a series of worship services focusing on being stewards of God's gifts – how "Discipleship is Stewardship", what are the traits of faithful stewardship, this privilege of being followers of Jesus. Today our theme focuses on Gratitude, what it means as part of the foundation of modern-day discipleship in this complex world.

Thanks for the musical leadership of Graham Laporte, who blesses us with his playing of piano and organ, and we are further blessed to have Debby Laporte singing this morning.

Red Scarf program – Let's fill up the coat racks! Deadline: Nov. 14.

If you are new here, please note the credits at the end of this worship on screen with contact information – Facebook, our website, email and just a traditional phone call to us to say hello and allow us to get to know you.

As we prepare to worship, let us take a quiet moment ... [silence]

Inviting Holy Light

I invite you to join me as we ground ourselves in God's love. Its height, and length, and width and breadth cannot be measured. For us it shines, welcomes and guides all who need it. Take a deep breath, not shallow in your chest, but into your stomach. Breathe in life-giving oxygen, gratefully, mindfully. Breathe out your concerns, your to-do lists. Breathe, and be aware of your breathing, how you feel. The light of Christ welcomes us into worship ... *[light the candle]*

Nurturing Safe Space

We seek Holy Spirit and Love to help us nurture safe space in this place where all can participate in worship and life regardless of age, ability, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We all, whether you are joining online or those gathered physically in the sanctuary, we all gather a traditional territory of Indigenous peoples. We are grateful to be allowed to use these lands for growing spiritually and worshipping.

In the graphic are two of thousands of hearts made by children to make “Heart Gardens”, an initiative a few years ago of the organization KAIROS. Each heart honoured the memory of students of residential schools who never made it home, and who suffered in that system.

To quote from moderator Bob Smith who made an apology in 1986 right here in Sudbury:

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ.

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Indigenous, the Métis, ancestors of this particular land, particularly those of the Wahnapiitae First Nation and the Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek. Let us work earnestly for Reconciliation.

Call to Worship

We gather to give thanks, O Creator God.

Holy One, we are here.

Be with us as we pray and sing together.

Holy One, we are here.

Be with us in our words, in our listening, and in our hearts.

Holy One, we are here to worship, to remember that the gifts come from you and flow through us. Thank you, God.

Opening Prayer

God of infinite blessings, you touch our lives with love and blessings all around us. We come to this place today ready to hear your voice working through us, ready to celebrate your spirit among us. Help us to be open to your Word and to answer your call to each one of us. Amen.

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.

Prayer for Grace

We come our Gracious Creator, reflecting on how we have been doing spiritually over this past week:

Where have we felt powerless, even hopeless? In those times, did we turn to God rather than try to do it ourselves? (silence, play singing bowl)

When we have faced a challenge, maybe even feeling despair, did we look for blessing? Did we witness blessing? (silence, play singing bowl)

God, we seek your Grace...

Assurance

Our journey of discipleship does not end with powerlessness or lost hope. **Love wins! The Risen Christ showed us that hope never dies.**

God's love and grace is all around us, freely and generously given; it is within us and flows through us. To quote Canadian Blood Services – it's in us to give! God's love is everlasting and sustains us on the journey. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: MV 90 Don't Be Afraid

Don't be afraid. My love is stronger, my love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid. My love is stronger
and I have promised, promised to be always near. (*repeat verse*)

Time up Front – Gratitude

Do you have a special time of the day where you say thank you to God? Maybe you might do this in the morning, at meal times, or in the evening. We can say thank you to God any time, can't we, for blessings big and small. We can share our gratitude with others too, inspire them. Kind words to others for things they do, sharing food, sharing joy. Jesus showed how to say thanks – when he had that last meal with his friends he gave thanks to God.

I invite you to write down something or many things that you are thankful for on your paper hearts and leave it in the basket beside the offerings. We will display those hearts somehow up here at the front, those of you who wish to share your gratitude to inspire others of us. Thank you

Scripture Readings (Pat Martin)

2 Corinthians 9:1-5 Contemporary English Version

I don't need to write you about the money you plan to give for God's people. I know how eager you are to give. And I have proudly told the Lord's followers in Macedonia that you people in Achaia have been ready for a whole year. Now your desire to give has made them want to give. That's why I am sending Titus and the two others to you. I want you to be ready, just as I promised. This will prove that we were not wrong to brag about you.

Some followers from Macedonia may come with me, and I want them to find that you have the money ready. If you don't, I would be embarrassed for trusting you to do this. But you would be embarrassed even more. So I have decided to ask Titus and the others to spend some time with you before I arrive. This way they can arrange to collect the money you have promised. Then you will have the chance to give because you want to, and not because you feel forced to.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus was going through Jericho, where a man named Zacchaeus lived. He was in charge of collecting taxes and was very rich. Jesus was heading his way, and Zacchaeus wanted to see what he was like. But Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree.

When Jesus got there, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I want to stay with you today." Zacchaeus hurried down and gladly welcomed Jesus.

Everyone who saw this started grumbling, "This man Zacchaeus is a sinner! And Jesus is going home to eat with him."

Later that day Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "I will give half of my property to the poor. And I will now pay back four times as much to everyone I have ever cheated."

Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today you and your family have been saved, because you are truly one of God's special people. The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost."

Let us pray: Open wide our hearts, open wide our minds, open your word to us this morning, we pray; let your holy light shine upon it and through it, bringing us light and life. Amen.

Message: “Grounded in Gratitude”

This is the first of a three-week series focused on Giving and Discipleship. During our three Stewardship Sundays, this one along with November 14 and celebrating on St. Andrew’s Sunday – November 21 – I would like us to think about giving – giving of your time as well as giving of your treasures to causes that touch your hearts. How can we give intentionally, patiently, with our whole hearts not grudgingly?

Giving is rooted not in our global financial economy, it is grounded in God’s economy, it flows through us as we give. Today, the spiritual practice of gratitude as the foundation of discipleship.

We are in relationship with each other as a community of people on our faith journey. We seek to live as a disciple of Jesus and to centre our lives in the love and grace of God. Our faith in God and Jesus is expressed through our actions, our words when we talk to people.

That word “disciple” – maybe we don’t use that word often. Maybe you think only of those friends of Jesus in the Gospel stories. As a disciple of Jesus, how do we seek individually and as a community to share God’s abundance and love with each other and the world?

In the 2 Corinthians scripture passage, Paul is writing to remind the Corinthians of a gift they have promised to give. The gift is a collection Paul is taking to the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul is sending some friends in advance to make sure that the gift is generous (and given voluntarily).

I’m going to be honest with you, I was a bit uncomfortable reading this. It was an audacious message to Christian sisters and brothers – I hope that you will be generous as you said you would be. Whew!

What can Paul’s instruction for a generous and voluntary gift mean to us today? How do we give to the church and to others from a generous and voluntary place in our hearts?

For a gift to be voluntary and generous, we need to look at how we orient and root our spiritual selves. There are many practices that sustain us on this journey: spiritual practices that can help us be strong in mind and help us to remember why we are here, practices that nurture our soul and strengthen us in the journey to love Jesus and serve as he showed us. These practices help us to centre ourselves in God’s love and abundance.

I am betting that many or all of you have a spiritual practice for gratitude, or perhaps ten. We can make a habit of beginning and ending our day with a ritual of gratitude. We can create a ritual at mealtimes to say thank you to God. To begin or end our day naming the blessings of our day and in our life helps us to name that God is good. We trust in God. We bring to our consciousness the blessings in our life and know God is present in our lives when we can name them.

Gratitude is our response to God and God’s blessings. When we know in our heart that God’s grace is freely given, no strings attached, we are able let go of trying to hold on. We can rest in God who is generous, and then we can cultivate a life lived from a place of abundance.

The spiritual practice of gratitude makes a difference in us when we start to live differently and reach out to the world. When the practice of gratitude roots us and how we live, we breathe more deeply, and we are inspired. We breathe deeply into the sense of abundance and from this place we are inspired to give freely, no strings attached.

But there are many things in our life that get in the way of centring ourselves in God’s love and grace. Think about reading the newspaper or turning on the computer or TV to see another senseless tragedy. It’s where spiritual practices can breathe life into us, the realities of life – violence, injustice, people in power betraying trust.

There are many voices around us advocating for individualism, consumerism, and autonomy. Too many of us are caught up in busyness, the push to produce, achieve, and attain. It is exhausting. And when we are caught in this whirlwind, it leads us to live in a world of scarcity. There is so much that encourages us to view our world through the lens of scarcity. You know, scarcity – “seeing the glass half empty rather than half full”, of not enough. Through this lens we cannot give to others of ourselves, of our time, of our money. If we do give, it is not freely given, not voluntary. Jesus knew and taught of God’s abundance. He knew that God’s love and grace is freely given.

The Gospel reading today from Luke is the story of Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector, someone most people hated. A chief tax collector in the time of Jesus was a person who collected taxes for the Roman oppressors. Luke describes Zacchaeus as wealthy. One gets wealthy as a tax collector by extortion and embezzlement, by taking advantage of the people, including the working poor and the elderly. Luke also tells us that Zacchaeus has changed. Zacchaeus has seen that what he has done is wrong and is returning the money he has extorted.

I wonder what happened to Zacchaeus to make him change? When we meet him, he is trying to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. Might he have heard Jesus speaking and been changed somehow by Jesus’ message of God’s love for all? Jesus sees Zacchaeus in the tree, names him, and invites himself to Zacchaeus’ home for dinner. We can imagine Zacchaeus being thrilled to have Jesus in his home. Zacchaeus promises to give half of his income to the poor and, if he is caught cheating in the future, he will pay four times the damages. Jesus approves of his actions and names him as being a part of the family, a child of God.

Can you imagine what must have been going on in the heart and mind of Zacchaeus? I imagine he was filled with love and gratitude. He had a moment of transformation that led him to give his income to others. He seems to now live life out of a sense of abundance and generosity. And to prove to Jesus he has changed, he states that if he is caught cheating, he will pay four times the damages!

Zacchaeus is changed. He now sees the world through the lens of abundance, and he is filled with gratitude. God has called him and named him, and he responds with gratitude and giving. God calls each of us and names us, and through Jesus, teaches us to live a life of gratitude and giving.

Trusting in God’s love and abundance does not mean that there will not be difficult times. What it means is that we can move through difficult life experiences and trauma with resilience. Seeing the world in abundance can strengthen us to move through life when it is difficult. To give generously and voluntarily is our response to God’s love, which is freely given, no strings attached.

We are human and we need to be in relationship with each other, with God, with Jesus, to help us on this journey in life. These relationships are foundational in the practice of discipleship. We are called to co-create God’s vision here on earth, and this is not easy or light work. Our spiritual practices, done together and individually, help us to live with a sense of abundance and give us the will to share our abundance with others. We are blessed to be a blessing. Amen.

Hymn: MV 27 Creator God You Gave Us Life

1. Creator God you gave us life,
your image formed within our souls,
yet through the mist of time and space,
we search for that which makes us whole.

Through hands that paint majestic skies,
and voices chanting melody,
with words that reach beyond the page,
we comprehend your mystery.

2. In ev'ry flow'r and ev'ry tree,
we see your great diversity,
yet greater still we see your love,
expressed in our humanity.

Through hands that paint majestic skies,
and voices chanting melody,
with words that reach beyond the page,
we comprehend your mystery.

3. When with our hearts, our hands, our minds,
we share our gifts with all the world,
our spirits soar beyond the veil,
to touch the very face of God.

Through hands that paint majestic skies,
and voices chanting melody,
with words that reach beyond the page,
we comprehend your mystery.

Stewardship Moment (Debby Laporte)

Welcome to Everyone here in the Sanctuary, live-streaming or on U-tube – I am glad that you are joining us on the last day of October, Halloween, and the first day of our annual Stewardship program. After another year of waves of COVID-19, lockdowns and following all the protocols that are there to keep us safe we are here once again. And yes, we do have a lot to be grateful for.

Our theme this year is Discipleship is Stewardship. We have a discipleship flower and each petal describes the various things that discipleship entails: Prayer, Loving Service, Worship, Bible Study, Sharing Faith and Generosity. All of these encompass Stewardship which is the wise use of time, talent and treasure which is all aimed at deepening our relationship with each other and God and living a Christian life to do God's work at our church, at home and in our community and for the wider church.

We have used the resources provided by the United Church of Canada and you will find some of this in your packages which this year will be sent to most of our congregation via email. This is a change and is a result of the wise use of time and being green and is a direct result of COVID-19. However, some will be printed and mailed out or delivered and if any of you do not have access to a printer and wish to have a printed copy you can let me or Alison know. However, our desire is that you will like the digital copy. And we will have copies of the response card available in printed form on November 14th. You will receive your email this week and you will find a wonderful package which includes a letter from your Stewardship Team and one from Rev. Dave, the pamphlet which includes the narrative budget, some activities, and your response card. It is with gratitude to all of you who make this program possible due to your support of our church. And it is with my own personal gratitude that I feel so very blessed to get to work with a wonderful, talented and gifted team who generated ideas, and creative ways of doing things. Thank you Alison, Diane, Maureen, Graham, James, and Rev. Dave.

We will be having some of our own speak on November 14th and November 21st – stay tuned – you will not want to miss these testimonials.

Our church cannot function without your gifts of time, talent, and treasure. The incredible number of hours you have given have made a difference. Your care for others shows the deep commitment you have to living your faith. This program is designed as a review of what has happened for Stewardship during the year, expressing gratitude, and asking for your continued financial support.

We do hope that you return your response cards by the end of the program which culminates on November 21st which is also St. Andrew's Day. However, we would like them by the end of the year as we need to commence the budgeting process. Our work never ends.

As a token our gratitude we do have "Gratitude Jars" for you to take home, and for those that cannot come to church, you just need to call or email me or call Alison and a jar will be delivered to you. You will find some paper in the jars to use, and we ask that write down what you are grateful for. They can be brought back to the church or emailed to me or Alison. I will assemble these on a Bristol board and have the board ready for St. Andrew's Day. There are also some other treats included and you do not have to go trick or treating!

And thank you again for all you do for our church. Happy Stewardship!

Invitation to the Offering

Thank you for your time, your prayers, and your donations! As we have come to present our offerings at this table, we remember God's love, freely given. We remember our calling to walk in the way of Christ Jesus, who is generous to all. I invite you to give voluntarily and generously, for you are disciples of Jesus.

If you give to the larger holy work of God through our United Church of Canada by donating to Mission and Service, thank you for that too! You will find links to the different church websites at the end of this worship, so you can learn about what we are up to and how you can help.

Offering Song: "This Indescribable Gift"

Graham Laporte (pianist) and James Warner-Smith (soloist)

Offering Prayer

Let us pray: Generous God, we bring ourselves, our gifts, our talents to you. Bless each one of us. Take us, our gifts, and all you have made us to be, that your work may be done in this place and in the world. Through the power of your Holy Spirit and in your name, we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Community

God calls us to be a praying people so let us join our hearts in prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gifts of God. I'm going to suggest we offer this prayer differently today. I invite you to keep your eyes open, so you can see the images on screen, be aware of your space all that is there with you today. When in this prayer I say, "let us give thanks," your response will be, "**We give you thanks, Generous God.**"

For the earth and the goodness of creation,
the power of the earth to sustain us,
the wisdom of people to care, to learn, and to transform,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For the people who care and heal, the people who listen deeply,
the ones who are the hands and feet of Christ in the world,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For the people who guide and teach,
the ones who mentor and educate,
the people who inspire and create,
for their wisdom and guidance,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For those who stand up and speak out in truth,
the people who work endlessly for justice, for liberation, for peace,
the people who risk their lives for others,
for those who walk in the way of Christ,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

Finally, but importantly, we pray for all those people who have not been named in this prayer – those in our life who need prayer, those who we don't know or communities needing your grace, your healing, your love God. Along with our prayers on this list, those whose first names we have typed into the comments box online, we offer to you in this silent moment...

let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. (A New Creed, The United Church of Canada) Thanks be to God.

For the promise you make, over and over - to people of ancient times, and persistently to us in our inward-thinking modern times. For your promise that you will love us, and that you will be with us, guiding us and hearing our pleas for help as well as celebrations.

Let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 296 This Is God's Wondrous World, vv. 1 & 3

1. This is God's wondrous world, and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is God's wondrous world; I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, God's hand the wonders wrought.

3. This is God's wondrous world: O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is God's wondrous world: why should my heart be sad?
Let voices sing, let the heavens ring: God reigns, let earth be glad!

Blessing

As you go from this place, go with trust in God, the source of our blessings. Go with the spirit of gratitude, looking for the people and places to share generously, as we are a people rooted in God's abundance. May the love of God surround you, Peace of Christ be within you, and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you, now and always. Amen.

Benediction Hymn: VU 242 Let All Things Now Living, vs. 1

1. Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving
to God our Creator triumphantly raise;
who fashioned and made us, protected and stayed us,
by guiding us on to the end of our days.
God's banners are o'er us, pure light goes before us,
a pillar of fire shining forth in the night;
till shadows have vanished and darkness is banished,
as forward we travel from light into Light.

Postlude

Most of the prayers and responses today come from, *A Five-Week Worship Program • Discipleship Is Stewardship • Called to Be the Church* © 2021. Thanks to the authors of this resource: the Reverends Mary Nichol, Ryan Slifka, Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes, Bob Fillier, and Paul Douglas Walfall.

Prayer after the Scriptures written by Fern Gibbard, page 36. *Gathering*, Pentecost 2. Used with permission.

Prayer for Grace by Suzanne Nykilchyk.

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