

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
March 27, 2022 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

Welcome to Worship

Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 7:00 p.m. Sunday, March 27.

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

Prelude

Opening Hymn: MV 20 *God of Still Waiting, vv. 1, 2, 4*

1. God of still waiting, God of deep longing,
God of the heart's true rest:
hold us in fathomless peace, guard us with unwaning love.
2. Spirit of promise, Spirit of purpose,
Spirit of ceaseless prayer:
bathe us in life full and free, kindle our wonder and hope.
4. Word true and faithful, hope-bringing Spirit,
God of enfolding love:
come in your fulness and grace; work through our lives for your praise.

Inviting Holy Light

Another dawn, after the dark of night and rest. We gather, seeking to be enlivened by God's Spirit. Let us prepare, by taking a deep cleansing, slow, breath. Breathe again, and again. Notice your body filling, letting go. The rhythms of life – filling, emptying and filling again. We invite Holy Light to welcome Creator, Beloved and Spirit. [*Dave lights candle*]

Hymn: VU 376 *Spirit of the Living God, vs. 2*

2. Spirit of the living God, move among us all;
make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love:
humble, caring, selfless, sharing.
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!

Nurturing Safe Space

All are welcome in this space. Young or old. Whatever your ability, mobility, life experience, identity. You are welcome here.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We as people of faith inherit a legacy, a history of hurt, but also journey into new chapters of healing and reconciliation. Today, here we are worshipping on the ancestral land the Wahnapiitae First Nation and of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, this land where the Robinson Huron Treaty was made in 1850, and never honoured by Canada. We live, work, play, and pray on the Treaty lands. May we live in harmony and respect with all those who share the earth with us and be thankful to God as we move into a peaceful and healthy future together.

Welcome and Announcements

Hello there. Welcome to St. Andrew's United Church. Thank you to our musician this morning, Tracey LeGrand, who always blesses us. And to our reader Jill Bennett. Thank you to our Steward of The Month, Bev Chapman... Details in the NEWS.

Here we are on week 4 of Lent. Each week we find gifts in the wilderness – this week we will talk about forgiveness – you can see the symbol of a heart on the sign...

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. As always, you can get your Zoom link to join that time of connecting by sending an email to Diane. That email address will be part of the credits after this worship.

Call to Worship

From far-away places, from close at hand; with hearts troubled, with minds at rest, welcome your people, Holy One.

For we come to worship you.

Carrying heavy loads, travelling light; walking in fear, living in faith, welcome your people, Holy One.

We come to worship you with all that is good in our lives, with all that hurts and hinders us, with past and present in us and the future before us. We come to worship you and find our way home.

Opening Prayer

All along the path with God we gather at the edges of God's cloak joining the dance tripping along behind getting lost at so many turns and twists then finding a way home again. Our paths cross, intermingle, shift and swirl as life leads us on in the unfolding drama of our own story. If a resting place if a meeting point if a fork in the road whatever be this space and this moment use it, God, to shape and inspire us and grant to us a glimpse of home. Amen.

The Prayer Jesus Taught

Let us say together a fresh version of the Prayer Jesus taught:

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name. We pray for your reign of peace to come, We pray that your good will be done, Let heaven and earth become one. Give us this day the bread we need, Give it to those who have none. Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, From each one to each one. Lead us to holy innocence Beyond the evil of our days — Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy: Forever your name is All in One.

Hymn: VU 271 *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, vs. 4*

4. Troubled souls, why will you scatter like a crowd of frightened sheep?
Foolish hearts, why will you wander from a love so true and deep?

Time Up Front

Dave has a packsack in his hand.

So it's a good idea to take spiritual inventory; what is in our packsack?

Rock from the first Sunday. When we hear the word "wilderness" it can seem scary. But there is beauty in there too. We have to make sure we are safe going into a wilderness but it is quiet. This rock reminds me that I find quiet there.

Then the teardrop – remember Jesus talking about going to a big place called Jerusalem? He was so sad because the people there, Jesus knows, will hurt him. Sometimes people do that, but Jesus still loves them, and cries for them – so this teardrop.

Then we had a fig tree. Last week we heard Jesus tell a special story called a parable, about a fig tree. It was not growing fruit for several years, and the owner of the orchard wanted to cut it down. The Gardener, though, said, "Hang on, give it one more year. I will give extra love and care." God and Jesus teach us about patience, we get tired of waiting but sometimes we need to wait. Sometimes others need to be patient with us.

Today we are going to talk about forgiveness.

Today we hear a famous Bible story, a parable actually told by Jesus – that is a story where we all might hear it differently, and that is ok. But Jesus says that there was a father and two sons, one older son who always wanted to help his dad around the farm, then the young son who liked to have fun, asks dad for lots of money and heads out into the world. The young son makes some really bad choices and ends up having too much fun, he is hungry and desperate, and comes home for some good home cooking and love, but he really doubts that dad can forgive him. Well, dad does, throws a party and is sooooo happy.

Older brother, on the other hand, is not so happy about this. How can dad reward little brother's behaviour like that?

Maybe the way God works is something like this, Jesus says. God forgives us when we make mistakes. God doesn't just forgive those who behave well and make only a few mistakes, but God forgives the bad kid, the bully, the one who just doesn't seem to learn from mistakes. God forgives us too. Amen.

This is a repeat after me prayer:

God, thank you for always forgiving us.

Help us to find the love in our heart to forgive others like you forgive us;

Especially help us to forgive people who make us mad too. Amen.

Hymn: VU 271 *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, vs. 5*

5. For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind,
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.

Scripture Reading (*Jill Bennett and Marilyn Hurst*)

Luke 15, assorted verses (New Revised Standard Version)

Reader (Jill):

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So, he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So, he divided his property between them..."

Interrupter (Marilyn):

What is he thinking? That kid has always been trouble!

Reader:

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

Interrupter:

I knew this was going to happen. I told his Dad he was irresponsible. What a mess!

Reader:

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' "

Interrupter:

Is he really sorry, though? Or, is he going home to take advantage of his father again?

Reader:

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Interrupter:

I can't believe this, is his father really welcoming him back?

Reader:

Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Interrupter:

I hope he appreciates his father's forgiveness!

Reader:

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in.

Interrupter:

I don't blame him one bit!

Reader:

His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'

Interrupter:

You are right, it just seems really unfair!

Reader:

Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Interrupter:

Maybe the older brother will come to understand that his father's steadfast love was always there for him. It is always a joyous occasion to celebrate the coming home of a loved one.

Let us pray, God, just as it can be our habit to break, to unbind, to distance ourselves from those we love and from those who need us, so it is your habit and your way to draw us back together and to you, and to enfold us in your everlasting arms.

Message: "Courage to Forgive"

Message will be posted on the website when it is available.

Questions for Reflection:

This parable would likely have been received by Jesus' listeners, just as there were people with different experiences in the parable; tax collectors and sinners and also scribes and Pharisees in the crowd of this parable.

- How do you think each group might have heard this story, and what message would they have derived from it?
- What do you think it means to “come to ourselves”? (as the prodigal comes to himself when he is desperate)

Minute for Mission – “Thank You from M&S”

There's a saying: “You can't understand another person's experience until you've walked a mile in their shoes.” Today, there are 2,900 active and aspiring ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada, and you have travelled alongside them in their journey. Your gifts through Mission & Service support ministry students every step of the way by helping with education costs and providing financial support.

The Rev. Jason Meyers, a new ordinand, didn't grow up in the church. “It was through a series of events that happened in my life, through brokenness and suffering and having the person of Jesus influence how my life was unfolding, that ministry became an option,” he explains.

After his son was born, Jason couldn't ignore the call to ministry he had felt for some time. “After Isaiah was baptized, our minister asked me to write Isaiah a letter that he would read when Isaiah is confirmed as a teenager. I started to write things like ‘Isaiah, I want you to follow your dreams and follow what God is calling you to do in your life.’ I realized that I wasn't doing that in my own life.”

The day after writing the letter to his son, Jason walked to a theological college to learn more about ministry education.

A few years later, Jason was heading off on another walk, this time to his ordination ceremony. The journey started at Emmanuel College in Toronto and ended in Barrie, Ontario, a two-week, 225-kilometre-long spiritual pilgrimage. As he walked, Jason reflected on his journey with God and prepared himself spiritually for ordination and ministry.

That was in 2019. Since then, what has surprised Jason most about ministry is his expanding capacity to love. “I thought that when my kids were born, that was kind of the size my heart would be, but I've come to love the church, the people, and the vocation of ministry more deeply than I ever imagined. I'm so thankful that Jesus reached into my life and invited me on this journey with him,” he says.

And what would Jason say to those whose generosity has supported his journey to ordination through Mission & Service?

“I'd say it's worth it. The church is alive and vibrant, and it's worth investing in. The leaders are working hard and are bringing the best of themselves into the ministry, into the church, and into the world.”

Please give a gift through Mission & Service. Through your gifts, you show you care about quality ministry leadership. Thanks to your generosity, love is there, training and supporting leaders every step of the way.

Offering Moment

Helping locally St. Andrew's to partner with people who help the most vulnerable downtown. Giving to the United Church of Canada's Mission and Service allows us collectively to reach out to Ukraine and other places needing love and community. Thank you for all you do, and perhaps those of you who are giving here for the first time. Thank you.

Dedication Hymn: MV 191 *What Can I Do?*

What can I do? What can I bring?
What can I say? What can I sing?
I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

Dedication Prayer

As the prodigal made for home, we turn back to you.
As the parent celebrated his return, we rejoice with all who love you.
We are not worthy to receive all that we have, and what we offer is a simple token of all that you have given.
So receive us and our offerings as we come with grateful hearts into the love of God: Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Community

As we pray, I invite you to look at the photo in front of you. What path do you need to take now, perhaps changing your usual direction. Do you feel the tug somewhere?

Ahead, always ahead of me, we see the marks on the ground where you have trod. Quickly, all too quickly, dust and dirt cover the places you have been. But still when we look and when we strain to see, we find signs that you too travelled here, you too saw the need, heard the cries, were transfixed by the pain of unredeemed loss and unresolved strife.

Ahead, always ahead of us, we see you walk into the distance, suggesting that we might go with you that even I, we, might have the courage to come after you to see what you have done: to bind up wounds and heal broken hearts and at the end of the road lead humanity to a parent's arms wide in love that accept all that the journey has been all its false moves and wasted hours warmed away by one embrace that makes all well again.

Ahead, always ahead of us, you point out the challenges and the needs and laugh at our insistence that we have no gifts, no power, no voice, reminding us what you have given: feet to follow, hands to work, lips to tell how the land and its peoples may be made well.

Go ahead of us, then, let us follow: wherever the pain is, wherever there is rumour of conflict, wherever there is famine, wherever the water runs dry, wherever there are no arms to welcome home a son, a daughter, a lost child.

But, let us pause now, let us pray for those needs near to us and far. People who are tired and need of rest and help, people who cry out for justice and need to hear someone say, "I am with you." Let us pray silently for those people and situations of deep concern to us... [silence]

Let us go and embrace with the fullness of the parent's love in the power of the Spirit for the sake of you as you walk ahead. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 278 *In the Quiet Curve of Evening, vv. 1, 3*

1. In the quiet curve of evening, in the sinking of the days,
in the silky void of darkness, you are there.
In the lapses of my breathing, in the space between my ways,
in the crater carved by sadness, you are there.
You are there, you are there, you are there.

2. In the rest between the phrases, in the cracks between the stars,
in the gaps between the meaning, you are there.
In the melting down of endings, in the cooling of the sun,
in the solstice of the winter, you are there.
You are there, you are there, you are there.

Blessing

Arms opened wide to receive us, [invite people to open arms]
love given freely to reshape us, forgiveness generously shared to redeem us.

Go into the world [pushing motion], *the Spirit like a mother bird pushes us from this safe place to fly...*

Go in peace and in joy to journey again with God.
The blessing of God Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit be yours.

Amen.

Blessing Hymn: VU 639 *One More Step Around the World I Go, vv. 1, 4*

1. One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

4. Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough,
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Postlude

All Prayers today come from *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Lent/Easter. © 2022 Wood Lake Books Inc.

The Prayer Jesus Taught by Parker J. Palmer, found in *Peace Prayers*, eds. Carrie Leadingham, Joann E. Moschella, and Hilary M. Vartanian.

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