

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
Sunday, January 29, 2023, 4th Sunday after Epiphany

Welcome to Worship

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

Email smiletoday9@proton.me to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Opening Hymn: MV 12 *Come Touch Our Hearts, vv. 1, 2, 3*

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.

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to everyone! Next week, please join us immediately after worship, over a light lunch in the 111 Lounge at 12 noon. Lisa Long from Réseau ACCESS Network will be telling us about the work that this important partner of St. Andrew's does to care for the most vulnerable, particularly those who face addiction, homelessness, and HIV/AIDS. This presentation is also available via Zoom. The link in this week's NEWS.

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 Facebook page, YouTube channel, or website, or email our office manager so you can receive our weekly e-newsletter. We also have a Social Hour on Zoom, every Sunday night at 7. As always, you can get your Zoom link to join that time of connecting by sending an email to Diane. That email address is also at the end of the video and is on our main YouTube page.

Inviting Holy Light

In this morning light, O God, wrap us with the inspiration of night's vision. Within the restrictions we each may deal with, O Christ, free us to reach out to one another as companions along the Way. When we feel beaten down and discouraged, O Spirit, open us to your whispers of possibility empowered by faith. Amen. *[lights candle]*

Sung Response: MV 137 *Jesus You Are Welcome Here, vs. 4*

4. Welcome, Jesus, you are welcome;
let your loving light appear.
In our seeing, in our being,
Jesus, you are welcome here.

Nurturing Safe Space

We are all children of God, loved in our uniqueness, regardless of age, ability, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, or gender identity. In this space, all are welcome. May we as a community of Faith work towards making our spaces truly safe and welcoming, as our Creator pours love extravagantly upon each of us.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We begin worship by acknowledging that the lands where we gather today have been places of gathering for First Nations people as they camped and travelled across the land for generations beyond our knowing. Before people arrived from across the seas, these Nations lived, loved, raised children, and made a living. They lived in harmony with all that the Creator had made. As we gather today, we recognize those traditional sojourners in this land, particularly those on whose traditional lands we worship here at St. Andrew's, the Wahnapiatae First Nation and the Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek. We give thanks for them and for the lands on which we meet. We acknowledge that our history has come at a great cost to the indigenous community, and we commit ourselves to be partners in healing and reconciliation with understanding and intention.

Call to Worship

When we seek justice for the other,
when we love kindness more than ever,
we live as God asks us to live.

When we walk humbly through life,
when we offer mercy to those who hurt us,
we are the blessing God hopes we will be.

When we are willing to look foolish by following Jesus,
when we choose weakness rather than power,
we reflect the One who is in our midst.

Opening Prayer

In the intricacies of a spider's web, an astrophysicist is put to shame. In the songs of a meadowlark, an opera singer would be stunned to silence. In the practical joke played on Easter, death is knocked off its lofty perch. In the foolishness of your salvation, God of tenderness, you bring us new life. In your beloved child's execution as a common criminal, rather than a hero's death. In sharing your kingdom with the outsiders, while boasters fall silent, your foolishness in becoming human transforms our lives. Continue to call us to your foolishness, God in Community, Holy in One, even as we pray the traditional prayer Jesus taught...

The Prayer that 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

"Favour", a paraphrase based on Matthew 5:1-12, The Beatitudes

Reader: "Come sit with me," Jesus said to his disciples, "I need to ask you a favour."

The disciples and others gathered around Jesus and sat on the hillside. They were eager to hear what Jesus wanted to tell them and ask of them.

"The world needs your help. The world needs to know about my love. So, I need you to share it with everyone. But there's a catch." Jesus said. The people looked at him with wonder and a tiny bit of fear. The crowd began to mumble and stir.

Crowd Person 1: "A catch?"

Crowd 2: “What does he mean?”

Crowd 3: “Well, I love people a lot, so this should be easy.”

Narrator/Jesus: “No, it’s not going to be easy,” Jesus replied. “The world is going to reject you when you start helping me. You will be persecuted, and people will not say nice things about you. But it’s oh-so-important work, and I need your help.”

Disciple: (*standing beside Jesus*) “Um, Jesus, I dropped what I was doing to follow you, but I’m not too sure about that.”

Crowd Voice 2: “Yeah, are people are going to mock me? I don’t like that.”

Narrator/Jesus: “Fear not!” Jesus said. Jesus was quite fond of saying that. “You will be greatly rewarded for this work. You will be called Blessed. I will be so very proud of you, and so will our God. The Spirit will be with you and will help you because it’s an important favour I’m asking of you.”

Jesus looked at the crowd excitedly and saw blank stares. The people were unsure. But then, the smallest voice cried out,

Crowd 1: “Okay, Jesus! What do you need me to do? I’ll help you!”

Narrator/Jesus: And Jesus smiled. He always knew that the little children would be the leaders. “Thank you, my blessed, beloved child. I’m so grateful for you,” Jesus said as he stood up, looking for the person attached to the voice he’d heard. But he couldn’t find the child. So, he continued, saying, “I need you to always put the other person before yourself, and I need you to hurt when the world hurts. I will comfort you. I will save you a place in the reign of God. I need you to be hungry for righteousness because the world isn’t a fair place, and we need to work to make it fair. I need you to be full of mercy, and I’ll make sure the Spirit keeps you filled with mercy to spare. Can you please be honest? An honest heart is the one that will see God. And, oh...peace. The world needs peacemakers. I need you to always work for peace, my dear children. Even when the world throws ugly things your way, be peaceful. Always seek peace. And spread love. You can never spread too much love. I’ll show you how to love, so all you need to do is follow my example, and the world will be full of love.”

Crowd 1: “Sounds good to me.”

Narrator/Jesus: The crowd began to nod their heads in agreement. The people thought that this was important work, and they were up for the challenge. The world needed them, and they were ready to go out and help Jesus.

Narrator/Jesus: “Thank you, all beloved children of our God! I am blessed because I get to call you my friends. And the world is blessed because it gets to learn about me through you. So, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” Jesus stood up, threw out his hands and said, “Go! Now. You can do this. The world is waiting. And remember, you are never alone. I am always with you.”

The people got up to leave, and Jesus stood at the top of the hill, watching them walk away out into the world. Jesus was in the middle of saying a prayer of thanksgiving for everyone when he felt a thud at his feet. He looked down to see the smallest child with the biggest smile hugging his legs. Jesus bent down and patted the child on the back. The child turned and ran away yelling with a hug and a smile. Jesus could barely make out the words, but he thought he heard,

Crowd 3: (*very quietly from the seat*) “Here I come world! I can’t wait for you to meet my Jesus!”

Narrator/Jesus: And Jesus smiled.

1 Corinthians 1:20-25 (The New Testament translation)

The people of Corinth seem to judge themselves by the world's standards rather than by God's standards. For the people of Corinth and for us, God's way is reimagining a better reality, a better way of living into the fullness of who we are called to be as God's beloved, and unconditionally loving, children.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, while to those who are being saved it is God's power for us.

For it has been written: "I will bring ruin to the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." Where is the wise man? Where the scribe? Where the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not know God by wisdom, God thought it well to save the faithful by the foolishness of a proclamation. While Judaeans ask for signs while Greeks seek wisdom, we only proclaim the crucified Christ—both a stumbling-block to Judaeans and a folly to the gentiles, but to those who are called, Judaeans and Greeks alike, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom. Because God's foolish thing is wiser than human beings, and God's weak thing stronger than human beings.

For look at your vocation: that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many well-born; Rather, God chose the foolish things of the cosmos in order that he might shame the wise, and God chose the weak things of the cosmos in order that he might shame the mighty, And God chose the lowborn things of the cosmos and the things treated as nothing, the things that have no being, in order that he might nullify the things that do have being, So that no flesh at all might boast before God. And you are his in Christ Jesus, who for us became wisdom from God, uprightness and sanctification and the fee for emancipation, so that, as has been written, "Let the one-who-boasts boast in the Lord."

Prayer after Scripture:

O God, you turn things upside down, calling the wise to embrace your folly. Help us to grow in acknowledging our need for you. Open us to the vision of your reign on earth, and strengthen us to do our part. Amen.

Message: "A Foolish God in an Intellectual Age" (Torrin Maag)

The Message will be posted on the website when it becomes available.

Choir Anthem: Prayer, music by Robert Lau

Offering Moment

Thank you for sharing both your talents and treasures. Your donations will help 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!!

Dedication 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.

Dedication Prayer

Oh God, you bless us in so many areas of our lives, in places we often fail to recognize as blessing. Help us have eyes to see and hearts to understand the depth of your love and blessing. Today, we give, out of that blessedness, dedicating ourselves to lives of justice and love, giving all that we are and all that we have, to bring about your beloved community here and now. Amen.

Prayers of Community

God of all goodness, by glimpsing something of your vision of a just and merciful world, we become profoundly aware also of the inhumanity and suffering that exists in the world. We would feel overwhelmed if not for the tender beauty and hope that arises each new morning and shimmers from the heavens at night.

So, from a grace-filled place of gratitude and wonder we pray: We pray for Earth staggered under the weight of global warming and deforestation. Teach us, Lord, as your children, to see and work towards another way. We pray for people staggered under the weight of poverty, violence, and loss. Reveal a new way, your way, that guides us to reconciliation. We pray for nations staggered under the weight of pride, and a need to impose their, our, will. Challenge us to seek the vision Micah saw, to be your righteous people grounded in justice and mercy.

On the heels of a week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we pray also for the Christian Church staggering under the weight of what feels like irrelevance, often left behind a secular culture that seems to have learned your wisdom better than your church. Grant us the courage to see another way, even if the way requires significant transformation.

In this silent moment we offer our own individual prayers for our world, for situations near and far that desperately need your peace, your Shalom... *[silence]*.

God of all, hear the words from the depths of our hearts and may they flourish within your beloved children, of grace and compassion; your children whom we seek to be. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 509 *Here I Am, Lord, vv. 1, 3*

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in deepest sin my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them; my hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

Blessing

Go now, beloved,
to follow the love of God,
to be surprised by God's wonder,
to lift your voice for love and compassion.

Dare to believe that you are people
on a mission of healing and grace.

Feel God's encouragement to be a blessing
as you offer blessings with your heart and hands,
and know that you never, ever go alone. Amen.

Blessing Hymn: MV 209 Go, Make a Difference, vv. 1, 3

Go make a difference,
we can make a difference,
go make a difference in the world.
Go make a difference,
we can make a difference,
go, make a difference in the world.

1. We are the salt of the earth,
called to let people see
the love of God for you and me.
We are the light of the world,
not to be hidden but to be seen.
Go make a difference in the world.

Go make a difference,
we can make a difference,
go make a difference in the world.
Go make a difference,
we can make a difference,
go, make a difference in the world.

3. So let your love shine on,
let it shine for all to see.
Go make a difference in the world.
And the spirit of Christ
will be with us as we go.
Go make a difference in the world.

Go make a difference,
we can make a difference,
go make a difference in the world.
Go make a difference,
we can make a difference,
go, make a difference in the world.

Postlude

Inviting Holy Light written by Gord Dunbar, *Gathering*, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2023, page 42. Used with permission.

Nurturing Safe Space written by Alison Warner-Smith, adapted from Canadian Shield Regional Council *Safe Space Statement*.” canadianshieldrc.ca

Acknowledging Traditional Territory, Canadian Shield Regional Council, United Church of Canada. Adapted from *Acknowledging the Land, 2016*. canadianshieldrc.ca

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Matthew 5:1-12, a paraphrase entitled “Favour,” Introduction to 1 Corinthians reading, Prayer after Scripture, Prayers of Community, and Blessing from *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany 2022-2023, January 29, 2023. © 2022 Wood Lake Books Inc.

1 Corinthians 1:20-25 from *The New Testament* translation by David Bentley Hart. © 2017 Yale University Press.

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