

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

March 19, 2023

Welcome to Worship – 4th Sunday of Lent
Join us for a Zoom Virtual Coffee Time at 7:00 p.m.
Email smiletoday9@proton.me to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Opening Hymn: VU 371 *Open My Eyes that I May See*

1. Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.

Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

2. Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear;
and while the wave-notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear.

Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

3. Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare love with thy children thus to share.

Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to everyone, in person and online. Together in Spirit. Today is the 4th Sunday of Lent.

Our Annual General Meeting for St. Andrew's United Church and St. Andrew's Place will be next week, shortly after worship. For those of you joining worship and the AGM from home online, we will have light lunch immediately after worship.

Lachlan will speak about the Community Vigil for a "Guaranteed Livable Income" that begins at St. Andrew's at 2:30 here in the sanctuary on March 26, next Sunday after the AGM. We invite people to bring a black t-shirt and to bring a candle, if you have one.

50th Anniversary worship service: Dave would love to have one more volunteer for planning worship for that Sunday, May 14.

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

Breathe into this moment, the sacredness of where we sit, now. Breathe lifegiving air into your lungs, let it fill your body. As God's Spirit surely fills this space around us in worship now. (*silence*)
The light is all around us – a sign of the season for us as northern people. (*light the Christ candle*)
The flame of this Christ candle reminds us of the beauty and presence of the light that paints the sky, bathes the land, and brightens our path. Thanks be to Creator for fire and sun, for flame and symbol, for the light of Christ.

Sung Response: MV 82 *Bathe Me in Your Light, vs. 1*

1. Bathe me in your light, O God of All, Creator;
let it shine upon my soul with healing and with grace.

Be to me a beacon bright through shadows of life's wounding,
showing me the way to live in faith, in your embrace.

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 respectfully acknowledge the land on which we live, work and worship as the ancestral homelands of the Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek and Wahnipitae First Nation whose culture was taken from them in large part because of Christianity brought to this land veiled thinly by colonization. We recognize all First Peoples who were here before us, those who live with us now, and the seven generations to come. As First Peoples have done since time immemorial, we strive to be responsible stewards of the land and respect the cultures, ceremonies, and traditions of all who call it home. As we open our hearts and minds to the past, we commit ourselves to working in a spirit of truth and reconciliation to make a better future for all.

Call to Worship

Scripture is full of questions...

Where are you?

Am I my brother's keeper?

Whom shall I send?

Who do you say that I am?

Who sinned?

How many times shall I forgive?

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Scripture is full of questions, so just like those in our scriptures,
may we bring our full curiosity and wonder into this space.

Let us ask and seek after our merciful God.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, walk beside us in this place and invite us to see what you see. May we find more love in our gaze and more grace in our presence as we worship you today, as we pray together the traditional version of the 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, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: MV 89 *Love is the Touch*, vs. 1

1. 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.

Time up Front

Dave will whisper in the ear of a person in the front row: "I'm looking for Jesus. He is calling me. Do you know which way it is to Jerusalem?"

So, today's story is about the judgments we make about people. This guy, who has been blind for a long time, has his system. He sits along the sidewalk, he has this sign and a bowl, and people give him money that pays for the stuff he needs. Then he hears these people talking, and this one man, this Jesus, suddenly makes the blind guys see.

This is life changing. But not all good. You see, the poor once blind guy but now who sees is dragged before the authorities who know about Jesus. They don't like him, and they really give the poor guy a hard time. Question after question. Back in those ancient times, religious people assumed that illnesses and tragedies were caused by people doing bad things. The powerful people are assuming that this guy did bad stuff to make him blind, but also angry at him that this Jesus guy did some magic on him.

Making judgments about people. Without knowing them, blaming them for things. Have you ever had a time when someone blamed you or someone else for something you didn't do? They wouldn't listen to you? It's not nice. And Jesus taught all the time, that this is wrong. We need to love people. Accept them. Even if they did do bad things. Getting to know them first, before we blame them, is important.

When we hear the stories of Jesus, and pray regularly, loving people, not judging them, we go to the source.

Earlier, I whispered in someone's ear a phrase. I'm wondering how far the message got? (Dave checks.) Asks the person at the far end, "What message did you get?"

"I'm looking for Jesus. He is calling me. Do you know which way it is to Jerusalem?"

Hymn: MV 89 Love is the Touch, vs. 2

2. 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.

Scripture Readings (Eric Maag)

Psalm 23 – one modern paraphrase "Through New Eyes"

Psalm 23 describes God as the shepherd who leads the people out in a new exodus, caring for their needs and offering protection. Ordinary fields and pastures are sources of food and places of refuge and shelter.

God is the guardian of my journey.
God sees me, one small person in this teeming city;
God shields me, gives me space to breathe;
Even though crowds press in on me,
God surrounds me with loving care.
Surely God will bring me safely home
and I will rest in God's presence and give thanks.

John 9 assorted verses (Common English Bible)

John 9:1–41 makes a series of contrasts – between physical blindness and spiritual blindness, between innocent ignorance and willful refusal to accept, between those who claim they know and those who recognize the truth.

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?"

Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him. While it's daytime, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." After he said this, he

spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (this word means sent). So, the man went away and washed. When he returned, he could see.

The man's neighbors and those who used to see him when he was panhandling said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

Some said, "It is," and others said, "No, it's someone who looks like him."
But the man said, "Yes, it's me!"

Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus made the mud and smeared it on the man's eyes on a Sabbath day. So, Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see.

The man told them, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I see."

Some Pharisees said, "This man isn't from God, because he breaks the Sabbath law." Others said, "How can a sinner do miraculous signs like these?" So, they were divided.

The Jewish leaders didn't believe the man had been blind and received his sight until they called for his parents. The Jewish leaders asked them, "Is this your son? Are you saying he was born blind? How can he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know he is our son. We know he was born blind. But we don't know how he now sees, and we don't know who healed his eyes. Ask him. He's old enough to speak for himself."

Therefore, they called a second time for the man who had been born blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner."

The man answered, "I don't know whether he's a sinner. Here's what I do know: I was blind and now I see."

Let us Pray: God of Good news, there is reading your Word, there is hearing your Word, and then there is building a home in your Word, laying your Word over us like a blanket, knowing your Word like the back of our hand, planting ourselves like a garden in your Word. God, we could listen to scripture like we listen to the news, or we could cocoon ourselves in your Word so it can change us entirely. So, bundle us up, transform us. With hopeful hearts we pray, amen.

Message: "Once blind, now, beginning to see"

The message will be posted on the website when it is available.

An Affirmation of Faith – by Rev. Sarah A. Speed

We believe in a merciful God,
a God who does not keep score,
a God who wants good for us.

We believe in a creative God,
a God who would heal with mud,
a God capable of seeing what we cannot.

We believe in a saving God,
a God who heals,
a God who greets our questions with patience,
a God who sends us out with hope in our step.
What wondrous love is this. Amen.

Poem: “Who Sinned?” (read by Diane Trollope)

“Jesus in the psych ward”¹ by Rev. Sarah A. Speed

He’s in group therapy, plastic chairs in a circle.
Paper cups with weak coffee. Everyone in the room has seeking eyes.
The Pharisees admitted him. They said things like,
He’s more than we can handle. They let the rumors fly.
The other patients like him. They say, He listens to me.
He calls them by name.
And when one of them asks,
Is this our fault? Are we here because we sinned?
Jesus does not wait for the facilitator to speak.
He crosses the circle. He kneels down. He grabs their hands in his and says,
Child of the covenant, God loves you too much to ever wish you pain.
Bodies and minds crumble sometimes, but God’s love for you does not.
And after that there were happy tears and the group was dismissed to lunch,
where they broke bread and no one talked of sin.

¹ Inspired by the poem, Jesus at the Gay Bar, by Jay Hulmes. Published in The Backwater Sermons. (Canterbury Press, 2021).

Choir Anthem: *I Will Keep My Eyes on You* by Cindy Berry

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Minute for Local Mission – Reaching Out Team

For the season of Lent, the Reaching Out team’s focus is on youth. According to the Homelessness Hub, literacy rates in Canada are among the highest in the world. Completing high school, and increasingly post secondary education, is considered a norm. However, for many youth experiencing homelessness, staying in school is a difficult challenge. Studies find that 63% to 90% of youth experiencing homelessness did not complete high school. Individuals with lower academic attainment are at a higher risk of unemployment, underemployment and poverty.

Although many children and youth have a desire to stay in school, homelessness disrupts their efforts. Without access to affordable housing, adequate income, proper nutrition and trusting supportive adults, school is not a realistic possibility for street youth. This often leads to a life of poverty.

What help is available to youth facing these challenges here in Sudbury? We have already learned about the invaluable role Sudbury Secondary School’s Value Vault plays in helping students stay in school. Another agency that works with and for youth is the Sudbury Action Centre for Youth, also known as SACY. SACY is a grass roots, non-profit organization that is focused on supporting people facing multiple barriers within our community. It began in 1986 as an employment program. It has grown to offer numerous essential services based on community needs. Most of the services are focused on youth aged 16-24.

Some of their programs include the Youth Program Drop in Space and the After School Program. These programs offer a non-judgemental drop-in space for youth 16-24. Youth gather for the purpose of socialization, recreation and access to social services. They are open Monday to Friday, 10 am to 5 pm. Marcel and I meet the staff and many of the youth weekly when we drop off muffins from the St. Andrew’s and Friends Muffin Mission. We are always greeted with big smiles and comments such as “thank you. The muffins are so delicious!”

Another service SACY provides is Provincial Youth Outreach Workers Program. This program provides connection between youth, their caregivers and community services. Youth between the

ages of 12-24 receive help navigating established public and private systems. They also offer free onsite counselling.

SACY is also responsible for The Northern Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing for Youth. This shelter operates overnight seven days a week including holidays. Youth receive drop-in services, housing referrals, hygiene supplies, breakfast and a safe place to rest for the night. It is accessible to anyone aged 16-24 on a first come, first served basis.

I have printed some brochures provided to me by Arvind Mohandoss, executive director of SACY, that describe all of the services they provide. They are on the Offering table and you are welcome to take one today.

The Reaching Out team thanks you for supporting our Lenten Project, Sudbury Secondary School's Value Vault. In this way, St. Andrew's is helping vulnerable youth stay in school.

Offering

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 537 *Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands (vv. 1, 2)*

1. Your work, O God, needs many hands to help you everywhere, and some there are who cannot serve unless our gifts we share.
2. Because we love you and your work, our offering now we make: be pleased to use it as your own, we ask for Jesus' sake.

Dedication Prayer

Loving God, giver of all things, as people alive to your goodness, we offer these gifts and the talents of this community to the service of all our children within our neighbourhood and beyond, throughout our nation and our world. Amen.

Prayers of Community

In your goodness, hear our hearts' prayers:

**We are alive to your imagining of a new world;
help us to make a creative difference.**

Shepherding God, we are painfully aware of how imperfectly love is expressed within our world. So, in trust, we turn, over and over again, to you. In your goodness, hear our hearts' prayers:

**We are alive to your imagining of a new world;
help us to make a creative difference.**

Although we do see good and hopeful change, we also witness violence and dysfunction whereby the most innocent and vulnerable continue to be forgotten, abused, or treated as of no account. In your goodness, hear our hearts' prayers:

**We are alive to your imagining of a new world;
help us to make a creative difference.**

Daily we see and read of the failures of those in places of power and leadership whose treatment of patients, parishioners, clients, spouses, and children leave us feeling ashamed, yet also mindful of our own shortcomings. In your goodness, hear our hearts' prayers:

**We are alive to your imagining of a new world;
help us to make a creative difference.**

We ponder this beautiful, painful, awe-inspiring world, this Creation that bears signatures of your beauty and mystery everywhere. We hold it in our hearts hand, lovingly. The people, the earth, the water, the creatures whom our human folly has harmed. The people who suffer because of

tragedy and loss, those who are persecuted because of greed, injustice. Those who face challenges that we cannot fathom. We lift our personal prayers for particular situations that we are aware of in this silence. (*silence*) Change us, O God. Create within us the desire and capacity for a love that can gently hold yet let go; a love that encounters all others with deep respect, and is concerned with others' well-being above personal interest. In your goodness, hear our hearts' prayers:

**We are alive to your imagining of a new world;
help us to make a creative difference. Amen.**

Closing Hymn: VU 266 *Amazing Grace*, vv. 1, 2, 5

1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved and strengthened me!

I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed.

5. When we've been there
ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.

Blessing

Go out into the world in peace and joy, knowing that in all your turnings God will restore your soul, and follow you with goodness and mercy each step of the way. Amen.

**Blessing Hymn: VU 430 *God Be in My Head*
(*CHOIR ONLY*)**

God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

(*CHOIR AND CONGREGATION*)

God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Postlude

Inviting Holy Light and **Acknowledging Traditional Territory** from Gower Street United Church, St. John's, NL, June 20, 2021. gowerunited.com

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

Call to Worship, Prayer after Scripture, Affirmation of Faith, and ***Who Sinned*** poem written by Rev. Sarah A. Speed, © A Sanctified Art LLC, sanctifiedart.org

John 9, assorted verses, from Common English Bible (CEB). © 2011 by Common English Bible.

Opening Prayer, Scripture introductions, Psalm 23 “Through New Eyes”, Dedication Prayer, Prayers of Community and Blessing from *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Lent, Easter, Year A. March 19, 2023. © 2023 Wood Lake Books Inc.

Time Up Front general theme from Dollar Store Children Sermons - March 19th, 2023, by Rev. John Stevens.

Thank you to: Rev. Dave Le Grand for leading worship; Ralph McIntosh for his musical leadership; Maureen McGuinness for reading the scriptures; Diane Trollope for reading the poem; Suzanne Nykilchuk for assisting with liturgy preparation; Jen Bruneau for assisting with graphics for the PowerPoint presentation; Myfawny McIntosh for arranging the Sunday readers; Jen Bruneau, Maureen McGuinness, and Suzanne Nykilchuk for the sanctuary décor; and Mallon Appianing and Roger Pile in the audiovisual booth.
