

**ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH**  
**March 26, 2023 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, followed by AGM**

Welcome to Worship

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

Email [smiletoday9@proton.me](mailto:smiletoday9@proton.me) to get the Zoom link.

**Prelude**

**Opening Hymn: VU 703 *In the Bulb There is a Flower***

1. In the bulb there is a flower;  
in the seed, an apple tree;  
in cocoons, a hidden promise:  
butterflies will soon be free!  
In the cold and snow of winter  
there's a spring that waits to be,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.
2. There's a song in every silence,  
seeking word and melody;  
there's a dawn in every darkness,  
bringing hope to you and me.  
From the past will come the future;  
what it holds, a mystery,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.
3. In our end is our beginning;  
in our time, infinity;  
in our doubt there is believing;  
in our life, eternity.  
In our death, a resurrection;  
at the last, a victory,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

**Welcome and Announcements**

Welcome to St. Andrew's on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, a shorter worship that will be followed by our St. Andrew's AGM or, otherwise called, Annual Congregational Meeting.

AGM after worship – Zoom link (posted in comments on YouTube and in the News sent on Thursday), if you are able to, copy and paste link into your browser, and have it ready. Here we are going to have a quick light lunch then convene the AGM, beginning with the Place Annual Report at Noon, followed by the Reports and proposed budget of St. Andrew's United Church. If at home you have any questions, put them in the Comments box if you are joining us live. Connor will try to help you.

Vigil after the AGM: We will gather, those of you joining us as we learn more about the Guaranteed Livable Income, and why it has been a major focus of The United Church of Canada for years, in our attempt to ensure that the most vulnerable neighbours have the dignity of basic necessities like food, shelter and good health.

We have been so blessed by the artwork this Lent, and this week we have these two wonderful interpretations of the two Scripture readings today. Please take time to look at all the artwork in the 111 Lounge after this worship.

Social Hour is on Zoom every Sunday night at 7pm. To get your Zoom link, email Diane. Her email will be listed among the credits at the end of this worship service. The link was also sent in the NEWS on Thursday.

### **Inviting Holy Light**

As I invite holy light, I offer this prayer from Ruth Burgess of the Iona Community in Scotland:

Lighting a candle is an act of defiance.

Lighting a candle is a prayer for courage.

Lighting a candle is a step towards our Creator.

Out in the world, where You are, God, and where we live,

Help us, today, to light this, a candle of love and life. [candle is lit]

### **Sung Response: VU 382 *Breathe on Me Breath of God, vs. 1***

1. Breathe on me, breath of God,  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do.

### **Nurturing Safe Space**

In Psalm 139 the singer proclaims: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." That was not someone bragging, it was a faithful person celebrating the wonder and love that our Creator is planted in Creation, particularly here humans. How about repeating after me: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Look at someone around you and say to them: "You are fearfully and wonderfully made."

In our diversity is the mystery and beauty and holiness of God. May we celebrate the uniqueness, the quirks, the differences we each bring: Age, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Neurodivergence (that is, we think differently). That diversity reflects the mystery of a Creator whose wisdom is beyond anything we can imagine. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Amen.

### **Acknowledging Traditional Territory**

Recently I read a quote from Chelsea Vowel, a Métis woman from the Plains Cree speaking community of Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta. She said this:

If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure.

Disruption of colonial ways. Each week we try to make worship flow, but sometimes disruption is helpful, even necessary. So to that end:

We the St. Andrew's Community of Faith give gratitude for the lands that we live and worship on. Lands that have sustained countless peoples from time immemorial to the present. We gather as a people of faith seeking to find ways to live with justice and respect with all those who call these lands home. As Indigenous and Non-Indigenous brothers and sisters, we are called to honour the land, to live with respect in creation...to love and seek justice for all peoples.

We are part of the Robinson Huron Treaty made in 1850, our ancestors did not honour that Treaty. So, we give thanks for the Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek and the Wahnapiatae First Nation who were stewards of this land for millennia as well as the Metis people. May we be guided by the principles of right relationship and reconciliation in our worship now, in and in our sacred living in the coming week.

### **Call to Worship**

Come out of the depths of the wilderness of all that has been lost.

Push away the stone and wonder what glory could be.

**We believe that there is more than this sorrow.**

Come out into the morning light and find others waiting and hoping for love to mend hearts again.

**Our souls come together to watch and wait.**

**Creator God, here on holy ground, we praise you,  
and we listen for your Word.**

### **Opening Prayer**

Let us pray: Gracious God, we gather in love of Jesus the Christ and open ourselves to your Spirit. We open ourselves to your life in the midst of death. We open ourselves to your hope in the midst of despair. In the midst of confusion and uncertainty, we open ourselves to a new way of seeing things, a new way of understanding things in your love. Stir us in our depths and call us out beyond every resistance. We pray this along with a newer version of the Lord's Prayer that might make us understand that prayer in a fresh way:

### **The Prayer that Jesus Taught**

**Eternal Spirit, Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all. Loving God, in whom is heaven. The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the earth! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.**

### **Hymn: VU 271 *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, vs. 1***

1. There's a wideness in God's mercy  
like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in God's justice  
which is more than liberty.

### **Prayer for Grace**

Friends, this journey of Lent is one that invites us to be open to change; change in our own lives, seeking change in our community. Happy Spring, by the way, everyone! All the more reason to do some spiritual spring cleaning. Those dusty opinions that we have fallen back on for so long; the dusty traditions we lean on; the bitterness that we wear like a badge of honour.

Listen to these words that might be a prayer we claim, or reject:

Jesus, we forget that you know this feeling:  
we forget that you, too, have wept;  
we forget that you, too, have lost;  
we forget that you, too, have gathered at the tomb,  
you grieved for a friend, and felt the sting of humanity.  
For all the times that we think you don't understand,  
Sustaining God, Forgiving Christ, Companion Spirit...

**We are sorry.**

For the times we place the blame on you;  
for the times we create distance,  
imagining that you could never feel what we feel;  
For the times we allow a valley of dry bones  
to gather a sea of space between us;  
For the spiritual clutter that we allow to gather in us,  
Creator, Sustainer, Spirit...

**We are sorry.**

A Question to ponder in this silent moment: What aspect of your life needs transformation, like a garden taken over by weeds. Share your feelings in silent prayer with a Gardener-God who loves you so much.

**Pour yourself into the cracks in our hearts. Bring these bones back to life. Bring us closer to you. With gratitude we pray, amen.**

### **Words of Assurance**

Friends, we could spend our whole life ignoring God, putting up walls between ourselves and our Creator, or between one another. We can try to solve the world's problems all on our own – but God will still love you and me. Even in our shortcomings, we are God's beloved. So, hear and believe this good news:

**We are saved by grace through faith. We belong to God. We are not alone.**

### **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 Readings (Bert Brankley, and Alison & Jacqueline Warner-Smith)**

#### **Jacqueline:**

Let us pray: Creator God, why is bad news so loud? In the midst of violence, hunger, melting ice caps, our anxiety, it often feels like suffering has a microphone. How do we hear you? How do we find you? How do we know that these bones can live?

Today we bring our raw selves into this space asking that once more you would rush through this room like a mighty wind. Remind us that these bones can live. Speak to us in your still, small voice, but, let it be loud enough to speak to the sorrow of the day. Help us listen, not to the bad news of the day alone, but to the hope that you breathe into every word. Amen.

#### **Bert:**

#### **First Reading Ezekiel 37:1-10 – Common English Bible**

*Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones in this reading reveals God's promise to restore Israel, the community that is dried up and lifeless in exile, but who will experience the life-giving breath of God again and be restored.*

The Lord's power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord's spirit, I was led out and set down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. The Lord led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry.

The Lord asked me, "Human one, can these bones live again?"

I said, "Lord God, only you know."

God said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the Lord's word! The Lord God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the Lord."

I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them.

God said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, human one! Say to the breath, The Lord God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live."

I prophesied just as the Lord commanded. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company.

**Dave:**

**On screen: *Rubble* by artist Carmelle Beaugelin**

This is a quote from the artist, Carmelle Beaugelin:

It has been over a decade since my family in Haiti experienced the most traumatic earthquake in the nation's history. If you were to Google, "Haiti" and "earthquake," images of collapsed concrete and rubble would emerge. The most disturbing images are those of survivors, covered in white and gray ash and rubble, reaching out for rescuers to salvage them from collapsed buildings. Endless images are found on the internet of arms stretched out, identity-less faces of horror covered in soot, and faces frozen into expressions of despair by the spectating photographer's lens.

When I think of Ezekiel and the story of the dry bones, I think of those images. I've often heard sermons where pastors position God's people as the prophet to call the world into life, but what about God's people who are, as the bones, facing the despair of death? Their suffering is theologized away by those who consider themselves the righteous "Ezekiels" of the world, whose privilege weighs heavy on the bones of the suffering, like the concrete rubble in Haiti.

Rubble speaks to the realities of being made alive and yet not being allowed to live—a nameless multitude of God's people resurrected yet still bearing the scent of burial spices on their bodies.

Who are we in this story? Are we the bones seeking life? Do we perceive ourselves as spectators of suffering? Or will we choose to be participants in healing, as active agents of God's resurrecting power out of the rubble?

**Second Reading: A Paraphrase of John 11:1-45, "Mary, Martha and Lazarus"**

**Jacqueline:**

*Mary and Martha call for Jesus to come, but he takes a long time getting to Lazarus. Jewish understanding was that it took three days for a soul to leave the body completely; thus, Lazarus had been dead long enough to have nothing left other than a body decaying rapidly in the desert heat. We might wonder: Why did Jesus wait so long, then?*

**Martha – Alison:**

Martha said: I could not understand why Jesus did not come. We had sent him a message: "Your dear friend Lazarus is sick," we told him.

"Please come at once, so he does not die," we also meant but did not say.

Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days when Jesus came. I went out to meet him and could not hide my grief and disappointment.

"If only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that God will give you what you ask." Jesus insisted: Lazarus would rise again. Yes, I knew that.

"I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus declared. "Those who believe in me will live and never die. Do you believe this?"

**Lazarus – Bert:**

Lazarus said: The air is cold, but that's better than the heat of fever burning me up. It is dark, but that's better than the mind-piercing glare of the light. All around is silence, but that's better than hushed voices I can't understand.

Bands of cloth wrap me tightly, but that's better than sheets drenched with sweat. My tongue is dry, and my breath is stale; how can that be better than death? The air is becoming warmer. The gloom is dispersing. "Lazarus, come out!" They...are...unbinding...me! I am alive!

I did, but it was more than that. “Yes, I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God, the one who comes into the world!” There – I’d said it. Now I had told him what was dawning on me about him and seemed more important than anything else. Then I remembered Mary – how was I to move her from the paralysis of grief? Who else but Jesus could give her any hope?

### **Mary – Jacqueline:**

Mary said: I could not understand why Jesus did not come. We had sent him a message: “Your dear friend Lazarus is sick,” we told him. We should have said, “Please come at once,” but I didn’t think we would need to. I couldn’t understand it. I loved them both, Lazarus, my brother and Jesus, my teacher. Lazarus had died; Jesus had not come.

It was not until four days after we’d buried Lazarus that Jesus came. I didn’t know if I even wanted to see Jesus again. “The Teacher is here!” Martha told me. “He’s calling for you!” I rushed out in a mix of grief, disappointment, and unanswered questions to where Jesus was. I could not stand to look him in the eye or greet him face to face but simply clung to his feet.

Then I told him what had been on my mind for the last five days: “If only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” I watched my tears mix with the dust on Jesus’ feet, and then I felt his tears on my hands as he wept.

We took him to the tomb as he asked of us. “Take away the stone!” he said. Martha, ever practical, argued, “Lord, it will smell terrible! He’s been dead four days!” “Didn’t I tell you,” Jesus replied, “that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

They moved the stone, and Jesus prayed in thanks to God out loud for our sake. Then he shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” We waited and watched.

### **Dave:**

### **On screen: *Unbind Him* by artist Hannah Garrity**

This is a Reflection by the artist, Hannah Garrity:

As I met with this text, I was drawn to Jesus’ call for Lazarus to be unbound. To represent the fabrics used in preparation for burial, I wrapped a canvas in linen. You’re not really supposed to do that. ...

Jesus’ call for unbinding also includes the community. The foreshortened hands of the community, tasked with unbinding his body, reach in toward Lazarus. They reach through the concentric binding lines so that he can go free. Can these bones live?

In the strength of community, they can. The community made up of Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, and others all joined one another at the tomb to grieve for Lazarus that day. They came to support Mary and Martha. Jesus arrives as the community mourns together. Jesus cries in his grief. Their collective tears create the backdrop for this paper lace design. This diverse and neighborly community is who Jesus calls on to do the unbinding. Jesus makes sure that the community knows about this miracle so that they can share the news.

Where might God, through this community of St. Andrew’s United Church, be calling the church to be “unbound”?

### **Poem (read by Bev Chapman)**

#### ***Can these bones live? The answer is yes! (by Rev. Sarah Speed)***

It’s the question we ask at the end of our rope,  
when the storm is raging, when the monsters under the bed have introduced themselves.

When everything around us seems to be on fire.

It’s the question we ask when hope slips through like sand in a bottle,  
when the mockingbirds stop singing, when the news reporter leads with another mass shooting.



It's the question we ask when the depression moves in, making herself at home, making a mess of it all.

It's the question we ask when we're not sure if Easter will come.

Will it be Lent forever?

Will the sun ever rise?

Will this hope lead to something?

Can these bones ever live?

### **Hymn: VU 373 *As Comes the Breath of Spring***

1. As comes the breath of spring with light and mirth and song,  
so does your Spirit bring new days brave, free, and strong.  
You come with thrill of life to chase hence winter's breath,  
to hush to peace the strife of sin that ends in death.

2. You come like dawning day with flaming truth and love,  
to chase all glooms away, to brace our wills to prove  
how wise, how good to choose the truth and its brave fight,  
to prize it, win or lose, and live on your delight.

3. You come like songs at morn that fill the earth with joy,  
till we, in Christ newborn, new strength in praise employ.  
You come to rouse the heart from drifting to despair,  
through high hopes to impart life with an ampler air.

4. You breathe and there is health, you move and there is power,  
you whisper, there is wealth of love, your richest dower.  
Your presence is to us like summer in the soul,  
your joy shines forth and then life blossoms to its goal.

### **Minute for Mission**

#### **Real-Time Relief Makes all the Difference – Thivan Hoang's Work**

First there was the pandemic. Then Russia invaded Ukraine, causing a global energy crisis and worldwide food shortages. These in turn worsened an already-precarious food security situation for many communities. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "the largest global food crisis in modern history is unfolding."

At a time when it feels like there's a new crisis confronting us each and every day, it's reassuring to know that our Mission & Service partners provide real-time relief around the world on a daily basis. Program Coordinator for Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response at The United Church of Canada, Thivan Hoang, reminds us, "There is no 'us' and 'them.' We are one community."

The United Church is an integral part of a multinational network of partners and ecumenical relationships in over 120 countries. That means whenever there's an emergency, Mission & Service is there to help.

In 2020, a major explosion ripped through Beirut, killing 200 people and injuring 7,000 more. Thanks to generous gifts to Mission & Service, we were able to support partners to respond quickly, providing critically important tools that helped to free people who were trapped under the rubble. And as the city recovers, Mission & Service partners continue to assist in rebuilding schools, homes, and other infrastructure.

Although Mission & Service has recently focused on COVID-19 relief, there's another looming catastrophe that requires our immediate attention. "Without a doubt, climate change worries me the most," Hoang says. "We're seeing increases of droughts, floods, and severe storms that have destroyed crops and agricultural land." The more we support Mission & Service, the better we can

respond to climate calamities. “People who contribute the least to greenhouse gases are often the most impacted by climate change,” Hoang explains.

Your gifts have made—and will continue to make—huge differences around the world. Wherever an emergency strikes, thanks to you, Mission & Service is there to help.

### **Offering Moment**

*Dave gives the Offering...*

### **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**

For all left by the side of society, for all whose strength has vanished, for all whose bones are brittle with despair, may our gifts bring hope and healing, peace and plenty, in your name and in your love. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Prayers of Community**

O Jesus who wept over the death of Lazarus, be with all who grieve. Be with us when we grieve.  
O Jesus who wept over the state of Jerusalem, be with our cities, our villages, and our centres of worship. O Jesus who wept alone in Gethsemane, be with all who feel alone, all who face difficult decisions.

O Jesus who wept, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” be with all who are tortured, all who are victims. O Jesus who offered up prayers with loud cries and tears, hear our prayers pouring from our hearts this morning. Prayers for family and friends, and strangers, celebrating joyful events, but also crying from our souls for tragedies near and far within our global village.  
(silence)

O Jesus who wept in sympathy and frustration, O Living God who knows all our pain and joy, be with us in our lives. Amen.

### **Closing Hymn: VU 278 *In the Quiet Curve of Evening (all)***

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.

3. In the mystery of my hungers,  
in the silence of my rooms,  
in the cloud of my unknowing, you are there.  
In the empty cave of grieving,  
in the desert of my dreams,



in the tunnel of my sorrow, you are there.  
You are there, you are there, you are there.

### **Blessing**

We cried to God from the depths, and God heard our voice. We came with our burdens, bound by our fears. We leave this place with hope released to serve a living God. Go in the strength of God who shows steadfast love, in the courage of Christ who shares our humanity, and in the companionship of the Spirit who gives life.

### **Blessing Hymn: MV 130 *Rise Up, Rise Up* (sing twice)**

Rise up, rise up, rise up, O my soul.  
Rise up and sing this blessing to God's name.  
Rise up, rise up, rise up, O my soul.  
Rise up and sing this blessing to God's name.

### **Postlude**

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**Call to Worship, Opening Prayer, Blessing, John 11:1-45, a Paraphrase ("Mary, Martha, and Lazarus"), and Blessing** from *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Lent, Easter. March 26, 2023. © 2022 Wood Lake Books Inc.

**Inviting Holy Light** from *The Holy Light*, page 8. Wild Goose Publications, [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com).

**Nurturing Safe Space and Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory** written by the CSRC Right Relations Team.

**Prayer for Grace** and **Prayer before scriptures** from *A Sanctified Arts: Seeking Words for Worship*, pages 12-14. © 2023 A Sanctified Art, [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org).

**Ezekiel 37:1-10** from *Common English Bible* (CEB). © 2011 by Common English Bible.

**The Prayer that Jesus Taught** written by Jim Cotter, found in *The New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*. © 1997 HarperOne; Illustrated edition.

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

**Dedication Prayer** written by Thom Shuman, © Thom M. Shuman, [lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com](http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com), Lent 5, Year A.

**Prayers of Community** from *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada*, page 158. Copyright © 2000 The United Church Publishing House. All Rights Reserved.

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