

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH
September 10, 2023 – Land Sunday, Communion

Welcome to Worship

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

Email sascha12@sympatico.ca to get the Zoom link.

Prelude

Opening Hymn: MV 135 *Called by Earth and Sky*

**Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.**

**1. Precious these waters, endless seas,
deep ocean's dream,
waters of healing, rivers of rain,
the wash of love again.**

**Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.**

**2. Precious this gift, the air we breathe;
wind born and free.
Breath of the Spirit, blow through this place,
our gathering and our grace.**

**Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.**

**3. Precious these mountains, ancient sands;
vast fragile land.
Seeds of our wakening, rooted and strong,
Creation's faithful song.**

**Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.**

**4. Precious the fire that lights our way,
bright dawning day.
Fire of passion, sorrows undone,
our faith and justice one.**

**Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.**

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to St. Andrew's on this Welcome Back Sunday! Today we begin a series of worship services celebrating the gift given us of Creation. This is Communion Sunday, so people at home, please gather your bread and cup. Social Hour is on Zoom every Sunday night at 7pm. To get your Zoom link, email Bev. Her email is above. The link was also sent with NEWS on Thursday.

Inviting Holy Light

We prepare ourselves now for worship. First by centring ourselves. Take this quiet moment to focus on your breathing... in and out. Notice how you feel, held by your chair, or couch, or the floor on which you sit. You are held also within Holy Love.

Holy God, we come to worship this morning brought together by your Spirit. It is your Spirit who teaches us to pray and helps us be your faithful ones. We ask now for the presence of your Holy Spirit: come to us as wind and fire, as bubbling laughter, as healing touch, or as the still small voice of peace. We acknowledge your presence as we invite this Holy Light. *[light candle]*

Sung Response: VU 232 *Joyful, Joyful We Adore You, vs. 3*

**3. You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
wellspring of the joy of living,
ocean depth of happy rest!
Source of grace and fount of blessing,
let your light upon us shine;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.**

Nurturing Safe Space

Every one of us is welcome in this space. We are blessed as a community, to be created in our diversity of ages, skin colours, sexual identity, gender, all the diverse ways in which our minds understand our world, all of us are beloved children of God, and we are welcome.

Acknowledging Traditional Territory

We are all Treaty people, worshipping on the traditional lands of the Atikemeksheng Anishnawbek and the Wahnapietaeping First Nation.

Those of you joining online from another Traditional Territory, I invite you to speak out loud whose land you worship from.

May we grow into living with respect on this land, seeking reconciliation through peace and friendship, while honouring Indigenous ancestors who cherished this land. We pray for the Holy Spirit to breathe healing, justice, hope, and compassion into all our relations and set us free from the harmful thoughts and actions of colonization.

Call to Worship

In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life, the name of Christ, the pulse of life, and the name of the Spirit, the breath of life,
Holy! Holy! Holy!

Earth is filled with Creator's presence.

Christ, you are indeed with us in this sanctuary we call Earth,
**A planet filled with your presence,
quivering in the forests, vibrating in the land,
pulsating in the wilderness, shimmering in the rivers,
wildflowers and mysterious mushrooms,
swirling grasses and goldenrods.**

We invite the farmlands to sing with us:
**wheat fields, orchards, and vineyards,
hay fields, gardens, and wetlands.**

We join with all the fauna of the fields in praising God:
horses, sheep, and cattle, grass snakes and grasshoppers, eagles and crows.

We invite the ground to stir deep below:
**life-giving microbes restoring the soil,
beetles and worms preparing our food.**

We celebrate the song of the soil!
Sing, Creation, sing!

Opening Prayer

Let us pray, God, our Creator, we celebrate your vibrant presence among us and our kin in creation, especially in the soil, the fields and the land. Help us to empathise with your creatures who are suffering. Lift our spirits to rejoice with the land, the flowers of the field and all the creatures of the countryside. In the name of Christ, who reconciles and renews all things in creation. Amen.

Hymn: VU 226 *For the Beauty of the Earth, vs. 1*

**1. For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

Time up Front

Some of you may have noticed that we went through a big change last week. I saw a lot of backpacks and bags on people walking around. What happened last week?

So, we were enjoying relaxing in the summer. But last week children, youth and many young and older adults started school. Many people went back to work.

A big change! Are some of you relieved? Why?

In these changes, we remember as people who follow Jesus, that God is always with us. When we are excited... when we are anxious or maybe even when we are downright scared.

So, we are going to bless your bags, your backpacks, your briefcases, whatever bag you brought today. Online, do you have a bag, a purse, a packsack that you want to have blessed? Hold it out now.

Let us pray.

First for the children, youth, and adults all going to school after relaxing vacations:

Loving God, Wise Creator, remind us that you are with us as we return to school. Give us delight, curiosity, imagination, and patience as we learn, with other students and with our teachers. Bring calm when we are afraid. And may we share your love and compassion each day as Jesus taught. Amen.

Now how about for those anxious parents entrusting their children to a new school year?

God, we as parents, grandparents, neighbours, go through a range of feelings as our children goes to school. We are excited for the kids, but we also worry about the challenges they face. Bless all the students in their learning. Be especially with those children whose experience of learning in a classroom is difficult for many reasons. Bless the teachers, the administrators, and all the staff and volunteers who care for our children day by day. Help each of us to share with the children in our lives to value fairness, compassion, and community wellbeing as Jesus always did. Amen.

This is a repeat after me prayer:

Thank you, God, for our teachers;... our parents and aunties and uncles and grandparents who teach us many things... Thank you for our teachers at school who are special, too... Thank you for Jesus,... who teaches us to love love love... and then to love love love some more. Amen.

Hymn: VU 226 *For the Beauty of the Earth*, vs. 3

**3. For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

Scripture Reading (Jill Bennett)

Paraphrase of Psalm 139, verses 7-12, "Life Within Which I Live"

Let us pray. Like water flowing from the rock, may your Holy Spirit flow over us as we join our hearts together as your congregation, in sharing this serve of worship and receiving your word. Amen.

Land addresses Creator in prayer:

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I escape your presence?

If my particles fly to the heavens,
you are there.

In my depths of rock and sediment,
you are there.

If grains fly on the feet and wings
of butterflies, bees, and birds,
or wash from seashore to ocean bed
with the tides,

even there, your hand leads me,
your hand holds me tight.

If I say, "Night frightens me,
seems to smother me,
the light of Sun and Moon and Stars
has left me all alone,"

even fear does not frighten you,
for you see Night's beauty as clearly as Day's.

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Nowhere can I be without you.

Thank you, Creator, Life in which I live,
Light by which I see. Amen.

Matthew 12:38-40 (The Message translation)

Here is a reading from the Gospel according to Matthew, in which Jesus debates with scholars who want proof. The real truth is revealed through faith that opens our eyes and hearts to the wonders of the Creator.

Later a few religion scholars and Pharisees cornered him. "Teacher, we want to see your credentials. Give us some hard evidence that God is in this. How about a miracle?"

Jesus said, "You're looking for proof, but you're looking for the wrong kind. All you want is something to titillate your curiosity, satisfy your lust for miracles.

The only proof you're going to get is what looks like the absence of proof: Jonah-evidence. Like Jonah, three days and nights in the fish's belly, the Son of Man will be gone three days and nights in a deep grave.

Will you pray with me: Wonderful God, we give thanks that our journey has led us here, this morning; led us to your word for each one of us, where our hearts will be filled with your love, where our minds will be shaped by your teaching, and where our souls will learn to cherish and proclaim your grace in the world. Amen.

Message: *Faith seeking a new Heaven and a new Earth*

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

Questions to Reflect on:

- Have you ever seen land that seemed to be dead and lifeless spring forth with fresh growth? What happened to bring it to health? How did it feel to see it renewed?
- What do you think is the spiritual meaning of being *in an enclosed space, like a cave or whale belly?*

Offering Moment

God held out God's hands and created the world that God imagined. God's dream. So, too, we hold out our spirits in offering our gifts to help God's dreams for this earth to come true. Let us offer ourselves and our gifts to Christ's work of love and transformation.

Communion Hymn: VU 457 *As We Gather at Your Table*

**1. As we gather at your table,
as we listen to your word,
help us know, O God, your presence;
let our hearts and minds be stirred.
Nourish us with sacred story
till we claim it as our own;
teach us through this holy banquet
how to make Love's victory known.**

**2. Turn our worship into witness
in the sacrament of life;
send us forth to love and serve you,
bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion
to forgive as you forgave;
may we still behold your image
in the world you died to save.**

**3. Gracious Spirit, help us summon
other guests to share that feast
where triumphant Love will welcome
those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy blind us
nor will pride our peace destroy,
as we join with saints and angels
to repeat the sounding joy.**

Dedication Prayer

God, our Creator, through your love you have given us these gifts to share. Accept our offerings as an expression of our thanksgiving and as a sign of our concern for those in need, including all our fellow creatures on planet Earth.

With all creation, we sing out in gratitude to our Creator.

Sacrament of Communion

The Creator be with you and all creation.

And also with you.

Let us open your hearts;

we open them to our Creator.

Let us give thanks to the Maker of heaven and earth.

It is right to join every creature in praising God.

It is right to give you thanks, loving Creator. Your word is the impulse for all things to be, for space, stars, and stardust to appear, for Earth to emerge from the deep, for life to be born of Earth, and for humans to be born of Earth and the Spirit.

You created human beings to be your servants on Mother Earth, to care for our garden home; you suffered when they desecrated the Earth and its waters and lands.

Your Spirit was the life impulse in all things, restoring the broken and healing the wounded, groaning in anticipation of a new creation, stirring with new life born of water and the Spirit.

You chose to be born a vulnerable human being, to become a part of your Earth; to suffer, die, and rise from the dead to be the Good News of hope for all never to give up. You restore creation time and again in the natural cycles around us, you reconcile all creatures born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your presence is the living power in all things, the Christ deep among us, filling Earth—land, sea and air; filling every element and place; filling the grain and the grape we share with you this day.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, saints and sinners, ancient voices in the forest, high voices from the sky, deep voices from the sea, and the whole company of Creation, we proclaim your presence among us.

**Holy, holy, holy, God of all life,
earth and sea and sky and all things that exist
are full of your presence and glorify your name.**

Together, again, in response to the great mystery of this sacred meal we proclaim our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Together we remember that vision of God's reign shown to us in Jesus at table:

he shared food with followers and friends,

with saints and sinners,

with crowds of thousands on the hillside,

and a few friends in an upper room.

On the night before he died,

he had supper with his companions.

He took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them, saying:

"Take, eat. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then, he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he passed it among them, saying:

"Drink this. Do this in remembrance of me."

Through this loaf and cup, Jesus lives within us.

In word and deed, Jesus lives among us.

Prayers of Community

God of Mystery – God of community, Creator, Christ and Spirit - teach us to better empathise with Mother Earth within whom we are woven, intimately connected.

Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation, cries for justice from the land, the hills and the soil. Holy One, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit that we can hear if we listen to

Creation: The volatile weather patterns fomented by climate change. The overdevelopment of pristine land, as governments are doing, selling out nature for so-called progress. May we listen to the groans, a longing for a new creation. But may we also celebrate the healing of earth and atmosphere too. Sudbury being a great example, ravaged by mining, but also healed, thanks to partnering between mining companies, academics and government. Remind us always that it is never too late to change our lifestyle, even at the simplest level – educating ourselves and each other, and speaking up for environmental causes.

We give thanks in this quiet moment, for the many blessings we enjoy. Families and loving friends, rooves over our heads, a country that still cares for its most vulnerable, most times. Our health, good or not so good as it may be, we give thanks for health care and supports for when we are feeling ill or fragile. (silence)

We pray now for ourselves and those situations around us, and around the world of concern to us. We pray for countries disproportionately burdened by climate change, almost always countries with the least resources, and the culprits are the countries with the most resources. God, bring equity to our world, and your dream, your kin-dom, come. We offer our own personal prayers in this quiet moment. (silence)

Now I invite you to pray with me a fresh interpretation of the ancient prayer that Jesus taught...

The Prayer that Jesus Taught (VU 916)

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 echo through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! 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, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, 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 for ever. Amen.

Taking Communion

Come, for all things are now ready.

Come to the table with all your kin
and share with all in need:

the gift of healing for those in pain,
the gift of forgiveness for those in sin,
the gift of assurance for those in doubt,
and the gift of hope for those in tears.

**May we who share these gifts,
share Christ with one another and with all our kin.**

Prayer after Communion

And when we are gathered in that place to which you will direct us at the end of time, we will join with our sisters and brothers in forever praising your glory, your love, God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

Closing Hymn: VU 307 *Touch the Earth Lightly*

**1. Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care:
gift of great wonder, ours to surrender,
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.**

**2. We who endanger, who create hunger,
agents of death for all creatures that live,
we who would foster clouds of disaster,
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!**

**3. Let there be greening, birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden, hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.**

Blessing

May the God who is above all and through all and in all fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in Earth, the pulsing of Christ through Earth, and the dream of the Spirit that all will be reconciled, renewed and restored, through Christ, our wounded healer. Go in the peace of Creator God, the love of Christ, and held by Spirit. May we listen to Creation, for we are interconnected.

We go in peace, serving Christ and loving the Earth.

Blessing Hymn: MV 30 *It's a Song of Praise to the Maker, vv. 1, 4*

**1. It's a song of praise to the Maker,
the thrush sings high in the tree.
It's a song of praise to the Maker,
the gray whale sings in the sea,
and by the Spirit, you and I
can join our voice to the holy cry
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.**

**4. It's the chorus of all creation;
it's sung by all living things.
It's the chorus of all creation,
a song the universe sings,
and by the Spirit, you and I
can join our voice to the holy cry
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.**

Postlude

Most of the liturgy today is from “Land Sunday: We worship with creation on the land” (United States Version 1). Created by The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and found at seasonofcreation.com

Opening Prayer from “Land Sunday: We worship with creation on the land” (Australian Version 1). Created by The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and found at seasonofcreation.com

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