

**Applewood United Church
An Affirming Congregation
Hybrid Worship for May 14th, 2023
Christian Family Sunday**

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Music: “Gather Us In” MV 7

Gather us in, ground us in you.
Gather us in, ground us in you.
Gather us in, gather us in,
ground us, ground us in you.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Creator God, loving parent of humanity and all of life,
All: today we come to worship acknowledging our connections.
One: We pray together, sharing our hearts.
All: We sing together, sharing our breath.
One: We praise together, sharing our lives.
All: Creator God, loving parent of all our families,
One: the ones we choose and the ones chosen for us,
All: faith families, extended families, blended families,
One: hurting families, hopeful families,
All: supportive families, broken families,
One: all sorts of families are under your care.
All: We celebrate all families as we worship today.
One: Let’s pray together as this Applewood United Church family of faith:
All: Holy Parent God,
throughout time, you have called your people into relationships –
spouses and partners,
parents and children,
grandparents and grandchildren,
siblings, and uncles, and aunts, and cousins.
We thank you for those kinship ties.
You also call us to create familial ties with those in

**our faith communities, our neighbourhoods,
in our work and our vocation,
among friends and companions.
Remind us of your inclusive love,
so that we can build families rooted deeply in that love.
Lead us to radical welcome, to extravagant acceptance,
so that those families we build reflect the diversity of your world.
We pray in the name of our Sibling Jesus,
Amen.**

Opening Hymn: "Let Us Build A House" MV 1 verses 1, 2, 4, 5

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace;
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: A Litany for Mothers *from mothersunion.org*

Eve our first mother –

thank you for stepping out and being the first to understand the complexities of life.

Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth – thank you for your patience and courage in waiting for a miracle.
May all people longing for children be strengthened by your stories and comforted in their pain.

Hagar – thank you for your resolve in the face of exile.

May all mothers who are forced to flee or are forgotten be given hope in you.

Rebecca – thank you for your flexibility.

Let us remember all mothers who have to raise their children in a different country or far from their relatives and who feel isolated.

Rachel – you carried the burden of grief and wept for your children.

Hold the hands of all those mothers who weep for their children - children who have gone missing, who have died or are lost to them in other ways.

Jochebed – you used wisdom and insight to protect your children.

Give to all mothers this wisdom and insight in the bringing up of their children, especially in vulnerable times.

Naomi and Ruth – you showed that love can conquer all trials.

Help all mothers to love constantly when life seems impossible and despair weighs hard upon their souls.

Mary – the new Eve whose ‘yes’ to God changed our world forever.

Thank you for sheltering the Holy One all those years ago, for your faithful love and tender care of God’s most precious Son.

May we never forget that in your giving is our greatest receiving - of the gift of life wrapped in a manger and in a tomb.

May we know the true cost of relationship by holding our faith in Christ deep within our hearts as you once held him deep within your womb.

Amen

Sung Response: "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" VU 400

Lord, listen to your children praying,

Lord, send your Spirit in this place.

Lord, listen to your children praying,

send us love, send us power, send us grace.

Scripture Readings:

Acts 17:22-31 *The Inclusive Bible*

Then Paul stood up before the council of the Areopagus and delivered this address:

"Citizens of Athens, I note that in every respect you are scrupulously religious. As I walked about looking at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, 'To an Unknown God.' Now, what you have been worshiping in ignorance I intend to make known to you.

For the God who made the world and all that is in it, the Sovereign of heaven and earth, doesn't live in sanctuaries made by human hands, and isn't served by humans, as if in need of anything. No! God is the one who gives everyone life, breath – everything. From one person God created all of humankind to inhabit the entire earth, and set the time for each nation to exist and the exact place where each nation should dwell. God did this so that human beings would seek, reach out for, and perhaps find the One who is not really far from any of us – the One in whom we live and move and have our being. As one of your poets has put it, 'We too are God's children.'

In we are in fact children of God, then it's inexcusable to think that the Divine Nature is like an image of gold, silver, or stone – an imaged formed by the art and thought of mortals.

God, who overlooked such ignorance in the past, now commands all people everywhere to lives. For a day has been set when the whole world will be judged with justice. And this judge, who is a human being, has already been appointed. God has given proof of all this by raising this judge from the dead.

John 14:15–21 *The Inclusive Bible*

If you love me

and obey the command I give you,

I will ask the One who sent me

to give you another Paraclete, another Helper

to be with you always –

the Spirit of truth,

whom the world cannot accept

since the world neither sees her nor recognizes her;
but you can recognize the Spirit
because she remains with you
and will be within you.
I won't leave you orphaned;
I will come back to you.
A little while now and the world will see me no more;
but you'll see me;
because I live,
and you will live as well.
On that day you'll know
that I am in God,
and you are in me,
and I am in you.
Those who obey the commandments
are the ones who love me,
and those who love me
will be loved by Abba God.
I, too, will love them
and will reveal myself to them.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir: "A Home of Grace"

Reflection: Family in the Spirit

Hymn: "Spirit, Open My Heart" MV 79

Spirit, open my heart to the joy and pain of living.
As you love, may I love, in receiving and in giving,
Spirit, open my heart.

God replace my stony heart with a heart that's kind and tender.
All my coldness and fear to your grace I now surrender.

Write your love upon my heart as my law, my goal, my story.
In each thought, word and deed, may my living bring you glory.

May I weep with those who weep, share the joy of sister, brother.
In the welcome of Christ, may we welcome one another.

Spirit, open my heart to the joy and pain of living.
As you love, may I love, in receiving and in giving,
Spirit, open my heart.

Introduction to the Offering

Gift of Music: "Seek Ye First"

Hymn of Dedication: "Behold, Behold" MV 115

Behold, behold, I make all things new,
beginning with you and starting from today.
Behold, behold, I make all things new,
my promise is true, for I am Christ the way.

Offering Prayer:

**All: Holy God, through these offerings
we become partners with you in love.
We join you in our concern for all you have created,
and name plant, animal, rock, water and all humanity as our own brothers and sisters.
We share these gifts of our material resources
and our time with hearts full and spirits enlivened. Amen.**

Prayers of the People

In our prayers today we recognize International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia which is held each year on May 17th. Words from a prayer written for this day by Ruth Wood are included.

Creator, we come to you with both the joys and the sorrows of our hearts.
We are grateful for the gift of life and the joy that it can bring.
For families and friends who love us.
For allies who stick up for us,
even when we cannot risk sticking up for ourselves.
For the great diversity you have created in our world.
We pray for those who suffer from discrimination
because of their gender identity or sexual orientation.
Who worry about their employment or who cannot find a job.
For those who must hide who they are to find housing.
For those who are not safe on our streets.
For those who do not feel safe in their place of worship.
Help us to end homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia,
and all forms of discrimination and hate.
Show us the way to make this world a better place for all.

Today, O God, we gather on Christian Family Sunday
to give thanks and to pray for our families.

We thank you for families rooted in love,
where character is formed and values are learned,
where lives are filled with hopefulness and laughter.

We acknowledge that families often disappoint us.

People fight; people hurt one another.

Forgive us, gracious God.

Where there is pain, resentment or bitterness,
enter with your healing love.

Open our hearts to families who suffer abuse and violence.

Increase our compassion towards all with painful memories.

We pray with hope that all families,
may be a source of blessing and abundant life.

The Lord's Prayer (sung) VU 959

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power and glory are yours,

now and forever.

Closing Hymn: "Would You Bless Our Homes and Families" VU 556

Would you bless our homes and families,

Source of life who calls us here;

in our world of stress and tension

teach us love that conquers fear.

Help us learn to love each other

with a love that constant stays;

teach us when we face our troubles,

love's expressed in many ways.

When our way is undemanding,

let us use the time that's ours

to delight in simple pleasures,

sharing joys in gentle hours.
When our way is anxious walking
and a heavy path we plod,
teach us trust in one another
and in you, our gracious God.

From the homes in which we're nurtured,
with the love that shapes us there,
teach us, God, to claim as family
every one whose life we share.
And through all that life may offer,
may we in your love remain;
may the love we share in families
be alive to praise your name.

Let us reach beyond the boundaries
of our daily thought and care
till the family you have chosen
spills its love out everywhere.
Help us learn to love each other
with a love that constant stays;
teach us when we face our troubles
love's expressed in many ways.

Commissioning /Blessing

Sung Amen VU431

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

Happy Christian Family Sunday! As we have noted with our Prayers for reflection, today is also Mother's Day. While most of us celebrate this special day for moms, not everyone has a mother in their life now, and some have, or have had, complicated or even troubling relationships with their mothers. While we celebrate and thank all those who have 'mothered' us in our lives, Christian Family Sunday gives us an opportunity to explore the concept of family in different ways.

You've often heard me refer to Applewood United Church as a 'faith family,' and I believe this is an important description of the life we share together. It is a household of God, in which we work and play and worship together as siblings. Like any family, we can have challenges, and disagreements, but we also gather to support one another, to celebrate and to mourn, and to simply enjoy being together. We are woven together with the strands of love and shared history, drawn into a unique tapestry that we hope creates a picture of God's love and presence in our church family through collective lives and actions.

I think that Jesus created a family with his followers, with the disciples and those others who chose to accompany him as he travelled and taught. They depended on him, but also must have supported one another, prepared and shared meals together, rested together, talked about their hopes and their worries, and very likely worshiped together in the synagogues along their way. Jesus came to know them well, and I'm sure they not only came to know each other well, but also had fondness for each other. That sounds like family to me. The early church reflected this 'family style' of being together, sharing what they had, taking care of one another, worshiping and working together.

Jesus knew this family well enough to reassure them when he knew he was to leave them. They would not be alone, he tells them, and I love that he used the phrase "I will not leave you orphaned." To me, it just highlights that they were indeed a family, a diverse and large family, who didn't always agree with one another, but like our church family had their own strands woven into a faith story, one that we still ponder today. Jesus tells them that the Spirit is coming – as helper, as advocate, as comforter. It is the Spirit, weaving through each of our strands, that helps to connect us and make us that family of God.

Jesus speaks of the Spirit being within us, and that he too is within us, as he is within God and God is within him. We are intimately connected not only through the strands of DNA that make up our physical selves and connect us as the human family, but through the Spirit – a kind of spiritual DNA that marks us as the family of God, that links us together.

Other faith traditions also name the Spirit, especially our cousins in the Muslim and Jewish faith traditions, but also in the Baha'i, Hindu and Zoroastrian faiths. The faith family can become larger for us when we realize that we share this deep connection, this same spiritual DNA that can enliven us, encourage us, and lead us to action together. I have definitely felt that kindred connection around the table at Interfaith gatherings. It is as if, in some unnamed way, the Spirit draws us together and helps us to be open to one another.

How can we live well, as individuals and at the same time as a family of God, connected by the Spirit?

With Jesus as our model and teacher, we can value one another deeply, accepting our siblings as they are, including in our life those who others would push to the edges of community. We can be respectful of someone who asks us for money, even if we are not going to give them any, we can look folk in the eye when they speak to us, even if we feel a bit uncomfortable, we can tell folk about our church family especially when they don't look, or act, or sound like us. We can let the Spirit move us in these encounters.

We can find ways to get to know each other more deeply, with genuine interest in one another's perspectives and experiences. That may mean sitting with a new group at coffee time, or striking up a conversation with someone we don't regularly speak with after worship or at other events. We can listen deeply and openly to those with whom we speak, and let the Spirit flow through and between us, becoming the very threads that connect us.

With the Spirit's prompting, we can learn from each other, we can laugh and cry together, we can disagree and agree, and forgive and be forgiven. With God's help, we can remember that families change – and that change within our faith family is natural, but also sometimes necessary and life-giving.

If you are worshiping with us in the sanctuary today, you were given three threads tied together. The red yarn represents our Trinity of God, Christ and Spirit. The blue yarn represents 'self'. The green yarn represents the other members of our faith family hear at Applewood. I invite you to take a moment to

braid or twist those threads together as you offer a silent prayer to God. You might ask that the Spirit be present, you might pray for this community, or for an individual, you might offer thanks. After a few moments, I am going to ask you to exchange your woven threads with another – and you can repeat this exchange as many times as you are comfortable.

If you are worshiping on ZOOM, you are welcome to unmute and share greetings with each other while the threads are being traded and you have had a chance to pray yourselves.

May we always be open to celebrating our faith family here at Applewood, may we always know that our loving Parent God draws us into relationship. May we feel the presence of the Spirit, tethering us to one another, and the love of Christ connecting us. Amen