

Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Hybrid Worship for June 11, 2023

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: “Come and Fill Our Hearts” MV 16

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.
You alone, O God, are holy.
Come and fill our hearts with your peace,
alleluia!

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: We are called to gather here by our Holy God -

All: the One who calls us each by name,

One: the Source of life and wholeness.

All: We are called to listen here by our Compassionate God -

One: hearing words of inspiration and comfort, witness and direction.

All: We are called to action here by our God who also walks with us -

One: learning, praying, singing and working to bring God’s justice to all.

All: No matter who we are, where we are, how we live -

One: God calls us to inclusive community and to worship.

All: Thanks be to God!

One: Let’s pray together:

All: Loving God, you touch our lives

with mystery and hope, with purpose and meaning.

We gather virtually or physically today,

as one family united in our praise and in our trust in you.

Help us to be open to your Word,

to answer your call with courage and curiosity,

to see the face of Jesus in everyone we meet.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Opening Hymn: "God, Whose Love is Reigning o'er Us" VU 399

God, whose love is reigning o'er us,
source of all, the ending true;
hear the universal chorus
raised in joyful praise to you:
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
worship ancient, worship new.

Word of God from nature bringing
springtime green and autumn gold;
mountain streams like children singing,
ocean waves like thunder bold:
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
as creation's tale is told.

Holy God of ancient glory,
choosing man and woman, too;
Abr'am's faith and Sarah's story
formed a people bound to you.
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
to your covenant keep us true.

Covenant, new again in Jesus,
Star-child born to set us free;
sent to heal us, sent to teach us
how love's children we might be.
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
risen Christ, our Saviour he!

Lift we then our human voices
in the songs that faith would bring;
live we then in human choices
lives that, like our music, sing:
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
joined in love our praises ring!

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: *from enfleshed.com*

Holy One,
your Strange ways,
they astound us.

Among the mighty, your Wisdom is called foolish.
While others assert their power with force,
Yours unfolds like an invitation.
You never resort to weapons.
You turn from all paths of domination.
Beauty and truth are your means of persuasion.
Freedom is your promise.

While empire shouts false promises of security,
using fear to turn us against each other,
You whisper things of vulnerability,
of meals at table and sharing what we have,
of solidarity and new life.

When you, the Sacred, took on flesh,
You sought neither thrones nor prestige,
but made your friends among the outcast.
Sex workers.
The imprisoned.
The hungry and the ill.
The fed up and the weary.

Though you were presented with every opportunity
to seek importance among the elite,
to the end, you choose the edges,
making your home among the vulnerable,
living in solidarity with the criminalized and despised.

Abandoning the promises of conformity,
we hope to be strange like you.
Strangers to all that normalizes evil,
to power that corrupts,
to practices that demean or neglect.

Make us faithful to the peculiar calling of Christ.
Unafraid to bear the names of the despised.
Firmly planted in the confidence of your Holy Mystery –
the strange love that calls us to fight with and for each other,
and awakens us to the joy you set before us.
Amen

Sung Response: VU 951

Holy, holy, holy, my heart, my heart adores you!

My heart is glad to say the words: You are holy, God!

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 12:1-9 *The Inclusive Bible*

YHWH said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people, and the home of your parents, and go to a place I will show you. I will make of you a great people. I will bless you and make your name so great that it will be used in blessings. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you. And all the people on the face on the earth will be blessed through you."

Abram, who was 75 years old when he left Haran, began his journey as YHWH had instructed, and his nephew Lot went with them. Abram took Sarai his spouse, Lot, all of their possessions, and all the dependants they acquired in Haran, and set out for Canaan.

When they arrived in Canaan, Abram and his family traveled through the land until they arrived at the sacred place at Shechem and came to the oak grove of Moreh. The Canaanites occupied the land at that time.

YHWH appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." Abram built a an altar where YHWH appeared to him. Then they moved off toward the hill country east of Bethel and set up camp, with Bethel toward the sea and Ai to the east. Abram built an altar to YHWH and invoked the Name of YHWH.

After that they travelled in stages toward the Negev.

Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26 *The Inclusive Bible*

As Jesus walked on, he saw Matthew, a tax collector, at his post. Jesus approached and said, "Follow me," and Matthew got up and followed.

Now it happened that, while Jesus was at table in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and notorious "sinners" came to join Jesus and the disciples at dinner. The Pharisees saw this and complained to the disciples, saying, "What reason can the Teacher have for eating with tax collectors and sinners?"

Overhearing the remark, Jesus said, "People who are in good health don't need a doctor; sick people do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire compassion, not sacrifice.' I have come not to call the righteous but sinners."

As Jesus was speaking, a synagogue official came up, knelt down and said, "My daughter has just died. But if you come and lay hands on her, she will live." Jesus got up and went with the official, and so did the disciples.

As they were going along, a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the hem of his cloak; she was saying to herself, "If only I can touch his cloak, I will be healed."

Jesus turned around and saw her. "Courage, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." That very moment the woman was healed.

When Jesus arrived at the house of the synagogue official, a noisy crowd had gathered, and the flute players who served as mourners had already arrived. When he saw them he said, "Get out! The child is not dead – only asleep." They all laughed at him.

After the crowd had been put out, he entered and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. And the news spread throughout the countryside.

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir: "Come Now and Follow Me"

Reflection: Mercy not Sacrifice

Hymn: "I Have Called You by Your Name" MV 161

I have called you by your name, you are mine;
I have gifted you and ask you now to shine.
I will not abandon you; all my promises are true.
You are gifted, called, and chosen; you are mine.

I will help you learn my name as you go;
read it written in my people, help them grow.
Pour the water in my name, speak the word your soul can claim,
offer Jesus' body given long ago.

I know you will need my touch as you go;
Feel it pulsing in creation's ebb and flow.
Like the woman reaching out, choosing faith in spite of doubt,
hold the hem of Jesus' robe, then let it go.

I have given you a name, it is mine;
I have given you my Spirit as a sign.
With my wonder in your soul, make my wounded children whole;
go and tell my precious people they are mine.

Introduction to the Offering

Gift of Music

Hymn of Dedication: "Know that God is Good" MV 104

Know that God is good, know that God is good,
know that God is good, God is good, God is good.

Offering Prayer

All: **We could not do it on our own – stepping out in faith,
embarking on journeys to unknown places,
trusting in you above everything else.**

**So, bless us with your gifts as we continue to follow you,
seeking the lonely, helping the broken,
and bringing hope to our world.**

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

by Thom Shuman <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>

Prayers of the People

God of all our being, source of joy and comfort,
today we bring our thanks and gratitude for your gifts to the world,
and offer prayers for those who are vulnerable and marginalized.
We thank you for sunny skies and warmer days,
we thank you for refreshing rain and cool evenings.
We pray for those whose lives have been adversely affected by
changing weather across our country and the planet –
floods and droughts, wild fires and monsoons,
crops in jeopardy and livelihoods threatened.
Give us the will and the wisdom to make decisions that create and sustain
a healthy planet, and care for all creation.

God of love, we thank you for the great diversity of the world,
for towering mountains and deserts of sand or of snow,
for the fragrance and colour of June blossoms, and for all that
lives in the darkness of soil, cave or ocean floor.
We thank you for the diversity of humankind – colours, cultures,
genders, ways of living and loving that are unique and different.
We pray for those who have been marginalized because of their differences,
because we have forgotten that your love is for all,
because we have forgotten that you have created and embrace difference.
Remind us to be radical in our inclusiveness, bold in our welcome,
and ready to see the face of Christ in every visage we encounter.

God of compassion, we thank you for all that serve and provide –
trees absorbing carbon monoxide that helps to provide clean air,
bees that provide honey and help to pollinate fruit and vegetable plants,
health care workers and researchers and scientists,
teachers and thinkers and planners,
farmers and small market gardeners and migrant workers.
We pray for those whose lives are dedicated to serving others,
and we pray for those who need their care because of illness
in body, mind or spirit, because of changing circumstances in life,
because justice has been hard to find.
Help us all to recognize our call to be both servant and served,
providers and recipients, and so bring a sense of balance to our
own lives, and the lives of others.

We pray with one voice, through the words that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer (sung) VU 959

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by 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 and deliver us from evil
for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever.

Closing Hymn: "To Abraham and Sarah" VU 634

To Abraham and Sarah
the call of God was clear,
'Go forth and I will show you
a country rich and fair.
You need not fear the journey
for I have pledged my word,
that you shall be my people
and I will be your God.'

From Abraham and Sarah
arose a pilgrim race,
dependent for their journey
on God's abundant grace;
and in their heart was written
by God this saving word:
'that you shall be my people
and I will be your God.'

We of this generation
on whom God's hand is laid,
can journey to the future
secure and unafraid,
rejoicing in God's goodness
and trusting in this word:
'that you shall be my people
and I will be your God.'

Commissioning /Blessing

Sung Amen VU967

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

Near the end of my journey to ordained ministry in the United Church, I spent a day at Five Oaks Retreat Centre along with others seeking ordination, commissioning or admittance, and the folk who would be doing our final interviews. It could have been a stressful day, as our call to serve God in the United Church had its final 'testing.' Instead, we were treated with care, prayed over and prayed with, and invited to the shared meals with acceptance and welcome. The story of Matthew the tax collector's call, and the inclusive meal that followed, reminded me of that day, and of God's welcome and call – even to the "notorious sinners" who might have been present!

This scripture passage assigned for today is full of miracles as well – a little girl returned to life, a woman healed of an affliction that kept her from full participation in her community. These stories are included in both Mark and Luke's gospels, but placed in a different setting. They follow the healing of the man with demons and the request that Jesus leave the area in which that healing occurred.

For some reason, Matthew chooses to precede these miracles with the story of the tax collector's call, and the meal, which are also included in Mark and Luke. I like to think that the inclusive nature of that meal was as miraculous as the healings, because I truly believe that in all these instances, lives were changed as they were touched by God and when faith was acknowledged and accepted. Matthew's life was certainly changed as he began to follow Jesus, the lives of those invited to the table and into Jesus' inclusive circle were probably changed, the synagogue official and his family's lives were changed, without doubt the hemorrhaging woman's life was changed.

What of those Pharisees who were complaining? Could their lives have been changed as well? They call Jesus 'Teacher' so obviously acknowledge him as a person with both learning and leadership – and a person of some significance in the community, otherwise why be upset or even concerned with whom he welcomed to his table? In all the three synoptic gospels, Jesus' rejoinder that healthy people don't need a doctor, and that he had come not for the righteous but for sinners, is included. Only Matthew contains the shortened quote from Hosea: "I desire compassion, not sacrifice" and Jesus' direction that the Pharisees "go and learn the meaning of these words."

Those learned Pharisees would have known that verse well: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings." *Hosea 6:6* Love of God expressed through the love and acceptance of others rather than ritual or rule, compassion for even those "notorious sinners" instead of adherence to some form of judgement or view of who is "in" and who is "out." Would their study change their minds? Would they, too find a kind of transformation when they allowed themselves to be open to God's way in the words and actions of Jesus?

When I was a young child, my father travelled to Toronto for work training, and while in his classes became friends with another participant, a Jewish man whose home was not far from where the classes were being held. My dad was often invited to his new friend's home for dinner, and he regaled us with his welcome and with the menu items which seemed strange and wonderful to us. The Elders at our local United Church were not so impressed that my father had been dining with a Jewish family, and

wondered if he should be removed from their group. This seems absurd now, but fifty-five years ago the leaders in that church were not concerned with compassion, or love, or mercy, but only with what they considered “propriety” or acceptable behaviour, and a rigid adherence to what they believed was “correct.” Perhaps they too needed Jesus’ direction to find the meaning of “compassion, not sacrifice.”

Where are we in this story, and in the story of Abram’s call that was our Hebrew Testament reading today? Do we feel we have been called into something radically new, leaving behind what we have known like Matthew, like Abram and his family, or even the Pharisees? Do we see ourselves in the company of those “notorious sinners”, invited into God’s love and compassion despite some of our life decisions and sometimes our distance from God? Are we more like the synagogue leader or the afflicted woman, putting our trust and our faith in God who can transform our lives? Has our faith made us well in some way?

Certainly I have had my own experiences that relate to many of the characters in these scripture passages, and I imagine many of you have as well. God is always calling, and often calling us into the new and transforming. God is always welcoming, no matter who we are or what distance we think we have created between ourselves and the divine. Jesus is always teaching, asking us to look beyond our rituals and routines, our conceptions and beliefs, to find the heart of God. In God, and with God’s help, there is always room for new life, for hope and healing, for acceptance and new beginnings.

May we find ourselves called, accepted, loved and transformed today and every day! Amen