

**Joint Worship for July 2, 2023
Westminster United Church
with
Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community**

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 gather to worship God -

**All: we are friends and neighbours,
family and family of faith.**

One: We share our hopes, our dreams,

All: our prayers and our voices.

One: We share scripture and sacred space,

All: we share our time and our energy.

One: We share our faith in God, Christ and Spirit,

All: we share this time of worship.

One: Let's pray together:

**All: Holy Source of Life and Love,
bless this shared time of worship,
as two communities become one
for these summer weeks.
Help us to welcome one another,
learn from one another,
and appreciate both our differences
and our common ground.**

**We pray in the name of the One
who has always, and will always,**

bring us together in love – Jesus Christ.

Amen

Opening Hymn: “This Is the Day” VU 412

This is the day, this is the day
that our God has made, that our God has made;
we will rejoice, we will rejoice,
and be glad in it, and be glad in it.
This is the day that our God has made,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day, this is the day
that our God has made.

Open to us, open to us
your gates, O God, your gates, O God;
we will go in, we will go in,
to your holy place, to your holy place.
Open to us your gates, O God,
we will go in to your holy place.
Open to us, open to us
your gates, O God.

You are our God, you are our God,
we will praise your name, we will praise your name;
we will give thanks, we will give thanks,
for your faithfulness, for your faithfulness.
You are our God, we will praise your name,
we will give thanks for your faithfulness.
You are our God, you are our God,
we will praise your name.

This is the day, this is the day
that our God has made, that our God has made;
we will rejoice, we will rejoice,
and be glad in it, and be glad in it.
This is the day that our God has made,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day, this is the day
that our God has made.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: *“By Name” by Elaine Downie, adapted*

Made in your image,
every single one.
Knit together,
every single one.
Called into being,
every single one.

No matter what the headline says.
No matter what the state of my purse says.
No matter what my postal code says.
No matter what my accent says.
Every single one.

Called into being,
called by my name.

No matter where I shop.
No matter who I sit next to.
No matter what the label.
No matter.

Called by you, God.
Called into compassion,
called into action,
called as your own.
Every Single One.

Called to see you, God,
called to name you -
and one another –
beloved, holy, yours.

God of the rich.
God of the poor.
God of the struggling somewhere in between.
Rise with us in the morning and dare us to dream.
Turn our heads with your vision of justice and joy.
May we work together with hope as our guide.

May we greet all your children by name.
Amen

Sung Response: “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.

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 22:1–14 *The Inclusive Bible*

After these events, God tested Abraham.

“Abraham!” God called.

“Here I am,” Abraham replied.

“Take your son, “ God said, “your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, “Seeing.” Offer him there as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you. Rising early the next morning, Abraham saddled a donkey and took along two workers and his son Isaac. Abraham chopped wood for the burnt offering, and started on the journey to the place God showed them. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. Then Abraham said to the workers, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there; we will worship and come back to you.

Abraham took wood for the burnt offering and gave it to Isaac to carry. In his own hands he carried the fire and the knife. Then the two of them went on alone.

Isaac said, “Father!”

“Here I am, my child,” Abraham replied.

“Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “My child, God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.”

Then the two of them went on together. When they arrived at the place God had pointed out, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged wood on it. Then he tied up his son Isaac and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham reached out his hand and seized the knife to kill the child.

But the angel of God called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not raise your hand against the boy!” the angel said. “Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how deeply you revere God, since you did not refuse me your son, your only child.”

Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by his horns in a bush. He went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his child. Abraham called the place “God Provides,” and so it is said to this day: “On this mountain YHWH provides.”

Matthew 10:40–42 *The Inclusive Bible*

Those who welcome you also welcome me, and those who welcome me welcome the One who sent me.

Those who welcome prophets just because they are prophets will receive the reward reserved for the prophets themselves; those who welcome holy ones just because they are holy will receive the reward of the holy ones.

The truth is, whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones just for being a disciple will not lack a reward.

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Reflection: "Here I Am"

Hymn: "Will You Come and Follow Me" VU567

Will you come and follow me

if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

will you let my name be known,

will you let my life be grown

in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind

if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind

and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare

should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer

in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see

if I but call your name?

Will you set the prisoners free

and never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean,

and do such as this unseen,

and admit to what I mean

in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide

if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside

and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found

to reshape the world around,

through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Christ, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Introduction to the Offering

Gift of Music: "Soil of God"

Hymn of Dedication: "Grant Us, God" VU 540
Grant us, God, the grace of giving
with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully.

Offering Prayer:

**All: In the name and in the spirit of Jesus,
we bring our gifts to you, O God.
Help us to give with them
a ready mind,
a willing spirit,
and a joyful heart. Amen.**

Prayers of the People

Loving and Constant God,
today we bring prayers of gratitude and prayers of concern
as we open our hearts and minds to your presence.

We offer thanks for the blessings of this summer season –
blooming flowers and ripening fruits, warm sunshine and
opportunities for rest and renewal.
We bring prayers of concern for people suffering because of
wild fires and the smoke and damage they produce,
we bring our concerns for animals and birds whose habitat
has been destroyed, and whose lives are threatened.
Give us the wisdom and insight we need to see the root causes
of these changes to our climate and weather, and the courage
to make real change in our own lives to better the health of the planet.

We bring our thanks for the bounty of creation in this time – bright red cherries and strawberries, green asparagus and onions, crunchy broccoli and snow peas and cauliflower.

We offer our prayers for those without access to fresh food, who struggle to pay bills or who must choose between paying for housing or putting food on their tables.

In this season when there seems to be plenty, we pray for those who do not have enough – enough hope, enough employment, enough support.

Give us generous hearts, God, to give what we can of our resources to make a difference in the lives of those who need our help.

We thank you, God, for the relationships that sustain us – for friends and family, for our church community, for those who care for us in the health professions, or serve us in stores or restaurants, for those who pick up our garbage or clean our streets, for artists who entertain or enlighten us.

We pray for those who feel alone or lonely today, God, and for those who are grieving the loss of someone important to them. We pray for the ones who are worried that they will not have the connections they need as they face the challenges of health concerns, or aging, or changes in their lives.

Give us the compassion we need to walk with the vulnerable ones, God, and the patience to hear their stories and their concerns.

We pray in Jesus' name, the One who taught us to pray to you –

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
and deliver us from evil
for the kingdom, the power and glory are yours,
now and forever.

Closing Hymn: "I'm Gonna Live so God Can Use Me" VU 575

I'm gonna live so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna live so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I'm gonna work so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna work so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I'm gonna pray so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna pray so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I'm gonna sing so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna sing so God can use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

Commissioning /Blessing

Sung Blessing "When You Walk From Here" VU298

When you walk from here,
when you walk from here,
walk with justice, walk with mercy,
and with God's humble care.

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

Last week, I was invited by a friend from the Interfaith Council of Peel to share in her family's celebrations of Eid al-Adha, one of the most significant holidays in the Muslim year. As family including lots of cousins, in-laws and others arrived with potluck food items, gifts of flowers and greetings of "Eid Mubarak" (blessed Eid) exchanged, she explained to me the story behind the festivities.

In a shortened version, she described the tale of Abraham receiving a vision from God that included the command that he must sacrifice what he loved most – his first born son, Ishmael, born of the slave woman Hagar. At the last moment, as Abraham held the knife to his son's throat, an animal appeared to be a substitute for Ishmael, which was sacrificed instead. Ishmael lived on, and it is from this line of Abraham's descendants that Islam traces its roots.

I knew this story well, but of course in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is Isaac that is demanded as a sacrifice, and we certainly do not celebrate this story, even though it is an important foundation in our faith history. It reminded me that we actually have common faith roots with our Muslim siblings, and that the God they pray to is the same God we pray to, no matter what name we may use.

But whatever child is included, this is a terrifying and harrowing tale. How could we imagine God demanding a child sacrifice? Why would God test Abraham in this way? What could Abraham have been thinking as he led his child away from their traveling companions to a place where he would 'do

the deed'? What about Isaac – was he traumatized by his father's actions? And why would this story be included in scriptures at all?

Some scholars explain that the location where Abraham built the altar on which he would perform his sacrifice was called "God provides," and so this tale explains how that place got its name. They go on to state that in those ancient times, there were traditions that included child sacrifice, and this story states clearly that such practices were not to be followed in the Israelite community - "Do not raise your hand against the boy!" the angel said. "Do not do the least thing to him."

I think a clue to why this story is important can be found in the very first line of the reading. "After these events, God tested Abraham." What events? We return to the story of Ishmael, and his mother Hagar. Abraham and Sarah were both in their elder years and childless, and so they decide that Abraham should use the slave woman Hagar to produce a child, who Abraham names Ishmael. However when Isaac is born to Sarah, fulfilling God's promise to them both, she demands that Hagar and her son must be sent away, that they can have no part in the covenant that Abraham made with God, even though God had told Abraham that a great nation would rise from Ishmael. Abraham eventually complies with Sarah's demand, sending her and the child away with just a skin of water, knowing that they would be unlikely to survive.

So when God's command comes to him, Abraham had essentially already sacrificed a son, not because God demanded it, but because he and Sarah did not want any obstructions in Isaac's path to being the source for a great nation, because they wanted to control God's gift for their own benefit. That is when the testing comes. Perhaps we are meant to know that God would never let Isaac be harmed, just as God interceded to save Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness. Perhaps Abraham felt he needed to be tested after he had sent Hagar and Ishmael away.

Whatever turmoil was in Abraham's heart, he follows God's command, just as he followed God's command to move his family to new lands, and to trust that God will provide. I am struck by how often Abraham replies "here I am" in this translation of the scripture. His willing response – without the attempted manipulation we see in his dealings with Hagar – is perhaps something we can ponder and perhaps even practice ourselves.

Here I am, God, willing to follow you into uncertain times, willing to create a place to worship you. Here I am, God, willing to give up what I love – my money, my status, perhaps my church building. I am willing to show up and be present for whatever you demand of me, especially if that means I am also willing to stop trying to manipulate a relationship with God for some kind of personal gain. Here I am God, willing to be sent out like Jesus sent the disciples, looking for welcome in God's name, willing to offer that same welcome in God's name, trusting that God will provide.

God did provide for Abraham, for Isaac and for Hagar, for Ishmael and for Sarah. God provided opportunities to follow and serve, but also to live into God's way. God provides for us as well, opportunities to exam what we truly value, what we truly care about, and our own willingness to serve.

In times of seeking trust, in times when we feel tested, we can declare "here I am," and know that God will provide the way, perhaps not how we had imagined it would be, perhaps in a direction we could not have foreseen, but God will be with us, as God has always been. Thanks be to God. Amen