

Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Joint Worship for July 16, 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 Find the Quiet Centre” VU 374 verse one

Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Some seeds are large, like avocado or peach,

All: they are easy to see, but not always easy to grow.

One: Some seeds are very small, like oregano or carrot,

All: they are hard to see, but grow easily.

One: Some of God’s ways are huge,
like loving a neighbour or following Jesus,

All: they are easy to see but not always easy to follow.

One: Some of God’s ways seem small,
like showing compassion or welcoming a stranger,

All: they are harder to see but grow God’s love.

One: In every seed is mystery, and the potential for new and transformed life.

**All: Let us be seeds full of God’s mystery and potential
as we worship together today.**

One: Let us share our voices in prayer:

**All: Holy One,
as we gather for worship this day,
may we recognize the possibilities we each carry,
and respect the diversity in each of you children.**

**As we come united in your love,
may we seek out and find wholeness,
may we look for and find peace,
may we search for and find your presence.
And may we be ready for new life, new possibilities,
and ready to absorb the what we need from you and
from the communities of faith where we worship.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen**

Opening Hymn: "God, We Praise You" VU 415

God, we praise you for the morning;
hope springs forth with each new day,
new beginning, prayer, and promise,
joy in work and in play.

God, we praise you for creation,
mountains, seas, and prairie land.
Waking souls find joy and healing
in your bountiful hand.

God, we praise you for compassion,
all the loving that you show;
human touching, tears, and laughter,
help your children to grow.

God, we praise you for your Spirit,
Comforter and daily friend,
restless searcher, gentle teacher,
strength and courage you send.

God, we praise you for the Saviour,
come that we may know your ways.
In his loving, dying, rising,
Christ is Lord of our days.

Hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah, hallelujah!
Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Christ is Lord of our days!

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: A Reflection on Seeds

If you are attending worship in person, some seeds will be distributed to each person for this meditation.

If you are reading the service at home, you might find a seed to hold as you read this prayer adapted from the resource "Prayers for all Seasons Year A":

God of abundance,
you have planted seeds within our hearts;
seeds of compassion, kindness, mercy, and joy.
Thank you for these gifts of faith,
and we pray they will take root in our lives.
Where compassion has been planted,
help us to bear good works and service.
Where kindness has been planted,
help us to bear gentle thoughts and deeds.
Where justice has been planted,
help us to bear spirit-filled laughter.
We pause now to consider both the seeds you have planted,
and the seeds we may sow in others
help us to bear fruit in the world,
help us to plant hope in the world,
help us to recognize our role as seed and soil,
just as you provide both seed and soil for us.
Amen

Sung Response: "O God We Call" VU 411 (repeated)

O God we call, O God we call,
from deep inside we yearn,
from deep inside we yearn,
from deep inside we yearn for you.

Scripture Readings:

Romans 8:1–11 *The Inclusive Bible*

There is no longer any condemnation, however, for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit – the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus – has freed you from the law of sin and death. What the Law was powerless to do because human nature made it so weak, God did – by sending the Only Begotten in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, thereby condemning sin in this flesh. In this way, the just demands of the law could be fulfilled in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh; those who live by the Spirit, on raised things of the Spirit.

The mind of the flesh is death, but that of the Spirit is life and peace. The mind of the flesh stands in opposition to God; it is not subject to God's law - indeed, it cannot be, since those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit lives because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then the One who raised Jesus from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through the Spirit dwelling in you.

Matthew 13:1–9,18–23 *The Inclusive Bible*

Later that day, Jesus left the house and sat down by the lake shore. Such great crowds gathered that he went and took a seat in a boat, while the crowd stood along the shore. He addressed them at length in parables.

“One day, a farmer went out sowing seed. Some of the seed landed on a footpath, where birds came and ate it up. Some of the seed fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. This seed sprouted at once since the soil had no depth, but when the sun rose and scorched it, it withered away for lack of roots. Again, some of the seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. And some of it landed on good soil, and yielded a crop thirty, sixty, even a hundred times what was sown. Let those who have ears to hear, hear this!”

“Now listen to the parable of the sower. When people hear the message about the kingdom of God without understanding it, the Evil One comes along and snatches away what was sown in their hearts. This is the seed sown along the path. Those who received the seed that fell on rocky ground are the ones who hear the word and at first welcome it with joy. But they have no roots, so they last only for a while. When some setback or persecution comes because of the message, they quickly fall away. Those who receive the message that fell among the thorns are the ones who hear the word, but then worldly anxieties and the lure of wealth choke it off, and the message produces no fruit. But those who receive the seed that fell on rich soil are those who hear the message and understand it. They produce a crop that yields a hundred, or sixty, or thirty times what was sown.”

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Reflection: The Seeds of Possibility

Hymn: “In the Bulb There is a Flower” VU 703

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.

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.

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.

Introduction to the Offering

Gift of Music: "Creator God, You Gave Us Life"

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: Holy Creator, you have planted the seeds of love in us all.
Help us to be willing partners in nourishing your garden of
hope, compassion, and justice, and may we share your seeds of
love with all your people and creation.
Bless all our gifts, as we have been blessed in the gift
of Jesus Christ. Amen**

Prayers of the People

One: God, hear our prayers.
Sung response: "Nothing Can Trouble" VU 290
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
God alone fills us.

Nurturing, Creating, and Sustaining God,
we bring grateful hearts to our prayers today,
full of thanks for all your gifts to us,
for all the seeds of life that you continue to sow in us.
We thank you for the mystery in creation,
for life that bursts from beneath the soil in the spring,

for the immensity of information needed to grow the tallest tree
contained in a seed that we can hold in our own hands,
for the miracle of growth and blossoming and ripening.

We thank you for all those who work to preserve seeds,
and who teach us to live with respect in creation –
for biodiversity experts and environmental engineers,
for farmers and gardeners,
for those who continue to work in our community
like Greening Sacred Spaces or the Credit Valley Conservation Authority.

One: God, hear our prayers.

Sung response: “Nothing Can Trouble” VU 290

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.

Those who seek God shall never go wanting.

God alone fills us.

We know, God, that your people, like your creation,
can have strong roots but still be fragile and need the care of others.
And so we offer prayers today for those who are fragile in body, mind, or spirit.
We pray for those in hospital, and those at home,
being cared for by friends or family, or health care professionals.
We pray for the ones who feel fragile because they carry stress and worry,
and for the ones who must make decisions about the care of others.
We pray, God, for our own friends and family members who may be feeling ‘uprooted’.

Sung response: “Nothing Can Trouble” VU 290

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.

Those who seek God shall never go wanting.

God alone fills us.

Help us to nourish hope and faith in those we encounter.
Remind us that we can bear the seeds of justice in our community,
and help to create fertile soil for others.
Give us the courage to act boldly in your name,
as we pray together in the words Jesus taught us,
and with voices lifted in song:

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 for forever.

Closing Hymn: “We Shall Go Out with Hope of Resurrection” VU 586

We shall go out with hope of resurrection;
we shall go out, from strength to strength go on;
we shall go out and tell our stories boldly;
tales of a love that will not let us go.
We'll sing our songs of wrongs that can be righted;
we'll dream our dreams of hurts that can be healed;
we'll weave a cloth of all the world united
within the vision of new life in Christ.

We'll give a voice to those who have not spoken;
we'll find the words for those whose lips are sealed;
we'll make the tunes for those who sing no longer,
expressive love alive in every heart.
We'll share our joy with those who still are weeping,
raise hymns of strength for hearts that break in grief,
we'll leap and dance the resurrection story,
including all in circles of our love.

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
“The Seeds of Possibility”

Those of you from the Applewood community may well know that although I love my little gardens at home, I am not what one might call an ‘adept’ gardener. I am always delighted and more than a little surprised when something that I plant actually takes root and thrives. When my children were younger, we kept a small vegetable plot, and each spring they could choose something that they would like us to grow, and we would plant the seeds together. Carrots, green onions, green beans were often successfully planted, and I recall well the excitement when those plants would push through soil from the seeds we had sown, especially the very tiny carrot and green onion seeds, which looked more like specks than the more familiar seeds my children would encounter in an apple or a peach or a cherry.

You may have your own memories of sowing, and growing, and some of you may still be active gardeners. So Jesus' parable of the sower, and the description of the various environments that make growing difficult, is one that may speak to many in a personal way. Probably many in that crowd gathered on the shoreline as Jesus taught would have had their own gardens and small fields, and would have recognized those conditions that be unfavourable for growth, as well as the rich soil that produced abundance.

Very often when we read this parable, we focus on those four types of soil – hard-packed roadways, rocky ground, thorny patches, and that 'good' soil, and we will spend some time reflecting on what they mean for us as people of faith, and people called to share their faith in the world. But this is not a parable about terrain; it is a parable about God and God's character and nature.

So for a moment, let's contemplate that farmer, that allegory for God. I like to imagine the sower walking boldly and happily through the countryside – tossing handfuls of seed with abandon, not caring where the seeds land, confident that some will flourish. This sowing is extravagant, this God is extravagant, because there is more than enough seed to scatter, more than enough hope and love and truth to be flung absolutely everywhere.

There is an abundance of new life in the seeds that are sown – and God the farmer knows that some of those seeds will nourish the life of others, even when they do not sprout. God the cultivator knows that some seeds will sprout for just a short time and some may be overwhelmed after they do sprout. God the cultivator knows that some of those life-bearing seeds will find rich and nourishing soil, with just the right conditions for growth. And God the ultimate and profligate farmer just keeps on tossing out those seeds – those tiny and mysterious packets of potential.

In our lives, perhaps can sometimes see ourselves as the seeds, tossed by God and by our faith into various scenarios where our identity as followers of Jesus and faith may or may not be welcome, or recognized, and we may struggle to flourish in our faith and as communities of faith. There may be times that we identify as the sower, doing our best to share our best, and tossing out the potential for love and care and relationship with abandon, even when it is not always accepted. Perhaps there are times when we recognize our lives in the variety of growing conditions – times when our lives are so 'packed' with activity or with self-absorption that no message of God's love can grow, or circumstances where we hear but only for a little while, and we feel uprooted and lost, points where the noise of the world and the distractions of life prevent us from truly knowing God's presence and grace.

Yet I hope, in our lives, we have also experienced what it is like to feel that our faith can take root and grow, and to be part of community that has truly become fertile ground for our faith, and the faith of our siblings in Christ, to flourish. Faith thrives when we are nourished with God's word for us, but also when we are fed through our gathering to pray and to work together, to play and celebrate together, to question and study together. God's hope, God's love, Jesus' compassion and strength and acceptance blossom and grow, can become rooted in us and our faith communities as the seeds of faith in us break open in the rich soil of supportive and accepting and active churches – no matter what their size.

More than ever, we need to be like the Extravagant Farmer God, tossing out our own seeds of justice, of inclusivity, of love and hope. In the face of increasing acts of gun violence on our streets and in our cities, we need to sow seed of peace and compassion. Perhaps they will not sprout, but feed others who may then be able to offer real solutions and change to make our community safer. As acts of violence against the 2SLGBTQ+ community increase, with a rise of intolerance and hateful rhetoric, we need to sow the seeds of love and acceptance for all. Perhaps those seeds will only live a short time, but we have the capacity to continue to throw out those seeds as allies and supporters until they can find a

safe place to flourish. We watch food prices increase, we watch as war continues in Ukraine, we watch as people in our own neighbourhoods become more and more financially vulnerable, we watch as political leaders seem to dance around issues, and we throw our seeds of care and compassion, even though some of them will be overwhelmed by the troubles and distractions coming from the news.

With all the seeds we sow in God's name, and in God's extravagant and exuberant way, we will also see faith take root in a young person, or faith be renewed in an elder member of our community. We will see our blooming compassion make a difference in the life of someone who has come to us for help; we will see new growth in our own relationship with God, new places where God's justice and God's love need our help to continue to spread.

We do not sow, or grow, or tend the soil alone. God the Sower is present with us, encouraging our own acts of extravagant sharing. Jesus the Gardener is with us, tending and teaching and continuing to break us open to new growth in faith. The Spirit of Life and new life surrounds us, helping us navigate the diverse terrains of living, and leading us to find the rich and fertile soil that is God.

Thanks be to God. Amen