

**Applewood United Church  
An Affirming Community  
Joint Worship for July 23, 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: With joy and celebration, God welcomes us to this place.

**All: How good it is to gather in God's house!**

One: With joy and celebration, we welcome one another.

**All: We greet each other by name; we are equal in God's Kingdom.**

One: We open our hearts, to welcome God's love;  
we open our arms, to welcome God's people.

**All: Here, every single one of God's children is welcome.  
God of seeds and soil, our time is in your hands.  
Till our lives and soften our hearts. Sift the stony  
places of our souls till there is room to grow.  
Pour out your Spirit upon us in this time of worship.  
Together may we create a place where all are  
welcome, in Jesus' name.**

*Tom Shumann & Wetaskiwin Writers (Gathering Pentecost 1 2023)*

**Opening Hymn: "Come Let Us Sing of a Wonderful Love" VU 574**

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
tender and true, tender and true,  
out of the heart of the Father above,  
streaming to me and to you:  
wonderful love, wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus the Saviour this gospel to tell  
joyfully came, joyfully came,  
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,  
sharing their sorrow and shame,  
seeking the lost, seeking the lost,

saving, redeeming at measureless cost.  
Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;  
why do they roam? why do they roam?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget;  
home, weary wanderers, home!  
Wonderful love, wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love!  
Come and abide, come and abide,  
lifting my life till it rises above  
envy and falsehood and pride:  
seeking to be, seeking to be  
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

**Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: "Inner Garden" by Joyce Rupp**

Gracious Gardener,  
How wondrously you care for my soul.  
You send your waters of refreshment.  
You fertilize me with your wisdom.  
You warm me with your enduring kindness.  
You keep drawing me toward your light.  
New growth continually sprouts  
from the soil of my spiritual garden.  
Flowers of creativity bloom.  
Herbs of joy flavor my days.  
Vegetables of nourishment flourish.  
You constantly care for my garden,  
weeding it when weaknesses grow tall,  
turning the soil when the ground is hard,  
comforting and protecting me  
when enemies chew on my leaves.  
I thank the Gracious Gardener for tending my garden.

**Sung Response: "Open our Hearts" MV 21**

Open our hearts, open our minds.  
Open our lives to you O loving God.  
Open our hearts, open our minds.  
Open our lives to you O loving God.  
Open our hearts.

**Scripture Readings:**

**Psalms 139: 1-12; 23-24 *The Inclusive Bible***

YHWH, you've searched me,  
and you know me.  
You know if I am standing or sitting,  
you read my thoughts from far away.  
Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching;

you are intimate with all of my ways.  
A word is not even on my tongue, YHWH,  
before you know what it is:  
you hem me in, before and behind,  
shielding me with your hand.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
a height my mind cannot reach!

Where could I run from your spirit?  
Where could I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you're there;  
if I make my bed in death, you're already there.  
I could fly away with wings made of dawn,  
or make my home on the far side of the sea,  
but even there your hand will guide me,  
your mighty hand holding me fast.  
If I say, "the darkness will hide me,  
and night will be my only light,"  
even darkness won't be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day—  
darkness and light are the same to you.

Examine me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts—  
see if there is misdeed within me,  
and guide me in the way that is eternal.

**Matthew 13: 24-30, 35-43** *The Inclusive Bible*

Jesus presented another parable to those gathered: "the kingdom of heaven is like a farmer who sowed good seed in a field. While everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then made off. When the crop began to mature and yield grain, the weeds became evident as well.

The farmer's workers came and asked, 'did you not sow good seed in your field? Where are the weeds coming from?'

The farmer replied, 'I see an enemy's hand in this.'

They in turn asked, 'Do you want us to go out and pull them up?'

No,' replied the farmer, 'if you pull up the weeds, you might take the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest, then at harvest time I will order the harvesters first to collect the weeds and bundle them up to burn, then to gather the wheat into my barn.' "

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables. He spoke to them in parables only, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:

I will open my mouth in parables,  
I will announce things hidden  
since the creation of the world."

Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. The disciples also came in and said, " explain the parable about the weeds in the field."

Jesus answered, "The farmer sowing the good seed is the Chosen One, the field is the world, and the good seed, the citizens of the kingdom. The weeds are the followers of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the world, while the harvesters are the angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned, so it will be at the end of the age. The Chosen One will send the angels who will weed out the kingdom of everything that causes sin and all who act lawlessly. The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But those who are just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Abba God. Let those who have ears to hear, hear this!

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

**All:** **Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection: "Thoughts from God's Garden"**

**Hymn: "Fairest Lord Jesus" VU 341**

Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,  
O thou of God to earth come down:  
thee will I cherish, thee will I honour,  
thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown.

Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,  
robed in the blooming garb of spring;  
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,  
who makes the troubled heart to sing.

Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,  
and fair the twinkling, starry host;  
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer  
than all the angels heaven can boast.

All fairest beauty heavenly and earthly,  
wondrously, Jesus, is found in thee;  
none can be nearer, fairer or dearer  
than thou, my Saviour, art to me.

**Introduction to the Offering**

**Gift of Music: "O Beautiful Gaia"**

**Hymn of Dedication: "For the Gift of Creation" VU 538**

For the gift of creation, the gift of your love,  
and the gift of the Spirit by which we live,  
we thank you and give you the fruit of our hands.  
May your grace be proclaimed by the gifts that we give.

**Offering Prayer:**

**All:** **In life all things are spiritual.**

**So we bring our gifts of time, talents and money**

**to be blest for the work and witness of this  
community of Christ.**

**May these gifts sustain the ministries we have  
started and empower those that are yet to be. Amen.**

*Written by Jim McKean, Gathering, Summer/Autumn 2009, page 42. Used with permission.*

**Prayers of the People:**

*Adapted from Gathering Pentecost 1 2023, p. 68. Written by Sheryl McLeod. Used with permission.*

Dear God, on glorious days like this,.....a weed that cannot be repressed and produces seeds a hundredfold from one seed.

**We give you thanks.**

We live in a time when oppression is allowed.....able to ferment into bread to nourish everyone.

**We give thanks.**

We live in a time when it can seem like we live in fields,.....You seek us out and bring us flourishing possibility.

**We give you thanks.**

We live in a time when, for many reasons,.....needed and relevant, remind us that we matter in your kingdom.

**We give you thanks.**

We live in a time when people are stretched.....enough for everyone enough time, enough resources. Enough.

**We give you thanks.**

God, be with us as we reach out to help and to hold.....

Receive our prayers as we sing the ancient words Jesus taught us .....

**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 the glory are yours,  
now and forever.

**Closing Hymn: "May the God of Hope Go with Us" VU 424**

May the God of hope go with us every day,  
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.

May the God of justice speed us on our way,  
bringing light and hope to every land and race.

Praying, let us work for peace,  
singing, share our joy with all,  
working for a world that's new,  
faithful when we hear Christ's call.

May the God of healing free the earth from fear,  
freeing us for peace, both treasured and pursued.  
May the God of love keep our commitment clear  
to a world restored, to human life renewed. R

**Commissioning /Blessing:**

One: From this time of worship,  
God scatters us into the world,

**All: like seeds upon waiting soil.**

One: From this time of worship,  
Christ calls us to reach out,

**All: like sun and rain upon waiting seeds.**

One: From this time of worship,  
the Spirit invites us to grow,

**All: like fruitful trees, greening in God's presence.**

One: May you be rooted in God's love  
showered with Christ's peace,  
and borne upon the winds of hope.

**All: Amen.**

*Written by Wetaskiwin Writers.  
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2023, page 52.  
Used with permission.*

**Sung Blessing: "When You Walk From Here" VU 298**

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

**Reflection:** Thoughts from God's Garden

Let us pray together:

Creator God, as we meditate this morning on our scripture passages, open our minds and hearts to ponder familiar words and new thoughts and ideas. Amen.

Both the psalm and the Matthew passage are familiar readings. We've probably heard them many times and not always in the same way. It depends where we are on our spiritual journey and the frame of mind we are in at the time. The Psalm is comforting – to think that God knows us so well, loves us so unconditionally and guides us through life, is wonderful to hear.

The Matthew passage is not quite so comforting and easy to hear. As we discussed the service today and read the passage we all found it difficult. We are not comfortable with hearing about God tossing anyone aside, especially being thrown into the furnace. Jesus continues to talk about planting as we heard last week. However, there's a difference in this passage. The story focuses on something not so good happening to the farmer – bad seed which results in weeds.

Heaven forbid we let those flourish in our gardens. We have this image of neat and tidy, pristine gardens – lovely velvety green lawns, tidy, well cared for flower beds – and not a weed in sight! The farmers at the time would have like to see a field of beautiful golden grain waving in the breeze!

I've just had some landscaping done in my own garden and changed over to more native plants which will grow and fill in and look quite different from the manicured flower beds we are used to. It was interesting to talk to the people doing the work as they tidied and trimmed what already was planted and to refer to some plants by name which I had considered were weeds and needed to be yanked out! That highlighted for me that I'm not always good at judging between the wheat and the weeds!

I also remember my mother-in-law's garden in Newfoundland. She was pleased to see dandelions – yes pleased – she used the greens for salad, and also made dandelion wine. You can also make tea from the roots. Turnip tops and beet greens were not thrown away or composted – they were served as a vegetable!

I've listened to indigenous healers talk about the wonderful gardens which we have close by at Riverwood, and how lucky we are to have them. They have identified plants we think of as weeds as being good for curing ailments but they also remind us that these plants are needed in order to encourage others to grow in that space, we need variety.

So how do we feel about Jesus telling us not to pull the weeds until they are grown and we can definitely identify them? Our first thought would be to pull them out before they get too big, but if we listen closely, Jesus says we need to give them time to grow so we can definitely identify them as weeds and not something else.

We all have 'weeds' in our own lives – things we don't like so much about ourselves – our shadow side – and we know from experience that it takes time to rid ourselves of them. I'm sure we can all think of something – a bad habit, an attitude, a way of behaving – that has taken us quite some time to first of all identify and then to change.

There are people in our lives and communities who we don't necessarily feel should be there. We'd like to be rid of them sooner rather than later. There are also people who have lived with serious issues, addiction, committed crimes and definitely not been an asset to the community. We've probably wanted them out of the way, but they have found opportunities to grow and change, not weeds to ride ourselves of.

Richard Wagamese is an example of this. He was an indigenous man who was abandoned by his parents at the age of 2, was part of the sixties scoop and adopted by a white family in St. Catharines. As a result of the trauma he experienced he eventually ran away and became involved in alcohol and drug abuse. He was fortunate to be able to reconnect with family and community and his culture. He worked to change and grow and became an amazing journalist and author who shared his experiences widely, not hiding any of his history. He could have been identified at some point in his life as a weed which may

have been pulled too early, but thank goodness his Creator gave him time to grow and change as he listened to the wisdom taught by the elders in his community. I'm sure there are many others you could think of.

Jesus asks us not only to listen but also to hear what the message is and one thing we need to remember is that the weeding is not our responsibility – it's God's – but we are called to be God's partner on the journey, to plant the good seed, which Joan will talk a little more about. As I read the bible reading from Matthew I found it somewhat disturbing. Jesus was answering their questions about the parable and said that God was the only one who will judge our actions as we live our daily lives – the evil and the good works.

It astounded me years ago when a minister and I were in conversation about the horrible things people do against others – especially the children. He reminded me that the worst offender – if they **truly** repented – God would forgive them as only God knows what is in our hearts.

In our legal system the evil are found guilty – or at least most of them are sent to prison for their crimes. I always felt that too many are not punished enough. Although at times our system fails. Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter (a boxer) spent almost 20 years in jail for a crime he did not commit. He was innocent!

As a result he founded an organization to assist innocent people who were wrongly convicted. This week two indigenous men wrongly convicted 50 years ago were pardoned and declared innocent. Innocence Canada, founded by Rubin Carter, never gave up on them.

Jesus is telling us that it is not up to us to judge evil – we have to leave it up to God (the judge of everyone), the ones who walk in the light and those who walk in the shadow.

We, the children of God's creation, walk on this earth with the good and the evil. We are like the seeds sowed in the farmer's field – some grew as wheat and others as weeds. The weeds were collected and burned at harvest time and the wheat was collected and stored in the barn.

As a child I was taught of God's love, and to love everyone – even our enemy. And to also show love and compassion to all.

Jesus represents the Good One, our world is the field and the followers of Jesus are the good seeds.

I bought numerous envelopes of seeds which I planted in my back garden and in planters on my balcony. I inadvertently threw out the envelopes and did not remember where I planted the different seeds. I am now enjoying and surprises growing before my eyes. I am hopeful my garden will bear all the seeds, and maybe a few weeds, that I had planted.

Jesus is asking us to be good seeds and plant the seeds of goodness and love and acceptance of everyone. Yes, we may come across the weeds in our life, but we don't have to be concerned with being judges as God will judge in God's time!

I can be filled with hope as I continue to follow Jesus and his teachings throughout my life in the "garden" world that I live in and in my garden as it grows and blooms.

Parables are told to help listeners and readers understand issues and truths in simple terms and relate them to their own lives. Each listener or reader relates to the story in a different way based on their life experiences and knowledge. Just as witnesses to an event often have different viewpoints and recall different details so too we take to heart different points of each story.

My own experience in the garden is that you cultivate those plants you want and get rid of the others. However, as we talked and as I thought about it, for me, it became clearer that this is perhaps a story of God's kingdoms, earthly and heavenly, that I had not considered before.

Into the field sown with wheat seeds to provide a harvest of grain, necessary and useful, come weed seeds, tares, an injurious plant that closely resembles wheat as it grows, starting to grow in among the wheat seeds. Now, although they recognized that the weed seeds were growing there it would be very difficult to dig the plants out, growing as they were, intermingling with the wheat, without destroying the wheat plants. In the early stages they looked very much alike. It isn't until growth is done, and the wheat must be harvested, that good can be separated from bad. So, the owner says let them grow together in the field. It seems to me that our lives are much like that – we are all together. And, just as in the field, in our world, God continues to nurture and care for all.

Are we really so sure we know the difference between the wheat and the tares? Are we really sure we can pass judgement? Haven't you ever been fooled by a commercial or an ad, a misleading email, an image or display? Have you felt lured by a great deal, opulent surroundings, promises of financial gain-offers "Too good to be true"? Have we said an unkind word or two or excluded someone even before we know them or because we don't agree? Have we lacked compassion and mercy?

Somehow our communities are becoming places where people are being judged and excluded for so many reasons of race, religion, gender, sexuality, and status. Are we really ready to "judge a book by its cover" and are we the ones to pass that final judgement?

Here's a story from the Toronto Sun. It is so easy to condemn a person for being involved with drugs, and going to prison.

Coming back from a sunny Caribbean holiday with two kilos of cocaine sewn into her underwear got Canadian Emily O'Brien into big trouble. She got sent to prison. She spent nearly a year in Grand Valley Institution for Women, southeast of Kitchener, Ont., where she estimates 30% of inmates were in for importing drugs. O'Brien wants others to know how easy it is for women to get tangled up in the illegal drug trade. And it's often at the behest of a romantic partner. Importing drugs is a serious offence. Bail was set at \$50,000. The sentence: four years. Redemption – a life-long sentence for most cons.

The former drug mule is now a small-batch gourmet popcorn producer who just happens to hire ex-cons for her Comeback Snacks venture. "In life we all make mistakes – and even people who've been incarcerated deserve second chances," says the 31-year-old ex-con-turned-social entrepreneur who came up with her popcorn enterprise while in federal prison. The prison reform system is punishing, with little restorative initiatives. Erin got sober, began repairing her relationships with her family, and built a business plan with a social cause. "I'm one of the lucky ones. You're supposed to see successful reintegration like me all the time, but you don't,". Upon release, inmates hit a wall: "We need to be more kind and inclusive and offer support and growth after failure and mistakes". She has plans to speak at prisons and build a prison entrepreneurship program to provide grants to ex-cons to start their own businesses.

Who are we? We won't know until the fruit ripens and is harvested. Not until we are part of God's heavenly Kingdom. Who knows who we are? In Psalm 139, God knows, cares and is there from the beginnings of our lives through all life's stages until its end. Even when we go far away, God is already waiting for us.

That doesn't mean that God is always happy with what we do or how we behave. To help us grow, we are invited to follow the teachings from Jesus- many lessons and the two most important commandments- "love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind" and "love your neighbour as yourself". Jesus invites us into receiving infinite grace and forgiveness and hope. We have time to improve and change. We have time to show our strength as people of God in our own faith community and in the wider community. We have time to grow straight and true -bringing a harvest of seeking justice and loving kindness, giving of ourselves as we grow in a loving relationship with God and, as the psalmist says, looking to God as we are guided on the road to eternal life.

Thanks be to God.