

Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Hybrid Worship for September 17, 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: "Holy Sacred Spirit" MV 15

Holy sacred Spirit, breathe your breath on us.

Holy Sacred Spirit, breathe your life in us.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Under blue skies, God calls us to gather.

All: When the air is clear and fresh, we come.

One: Under clouds and in the rain, we are invited to worship.

All: When the atmosphere seems heavy, we come.

One: With awe and wonder for all that fills the sky,

All: we come to worship our Creator God.

One: Let's pray together:

**All: Holy Source of all,
attune us to the deep mysteries of creation.**

**Make our spirits sensitive to the forces of nature
at work in the atmosphere around and above us.**

Jesus, make our hearts sensitive to the wind

as God's messenger, God's breath and

God's life-giving presence.

Help us sing songs of celebration with the wind,

the weather and the oxygen in the air, the stars,

the rains, the light, and all that fills the sky.

Loving God, teach us to care for all that surrounds

and supports us. Amen

Opening prayer adapted from seasonsofcreation.com

Opening Hymn: “This Is God’s Wondrous World” VU 296

This is God's wondrous world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.

This is God's wondrous world;
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
God's hand the wonders wrought.

This is God's wondrous world:
the birds their carols raise;
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their Maker's praise.
This is God's wondrous world:
God shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass or mountain pass,
God's voice speaks everywhere.

This is God's wondrous world:
O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.
This is God's wondrous world:
why should my heart be sad?
Let voices sing, let the heavens ring:
God reigns, let earth be glad!

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: A Prayer of the Cosmos (adapted) *greenchurches.ca*

**All: Loving God, loving God, all creation calls you blessed,
 and so do we, and so do we.**

Loving God, all your creation calls you blessed.
Your spirit imprints the whole universe with life and mystery.
Yes, all creation proclaims your love.
We now join this chorus of praise.

**All: Loving God, loving God, all creation calls you blessed,
 and so do we, and so do we.**

For you have woven an intimate tapestry
and call it life and called it good.

In love you have formed a universe so diverse yet so related,
and into its web you call us forth
to walk the land and swim the sea
with all our natural brothers and sisters.

To the stars we seem no more than blades of grass.
Yet to you, each of us, as each blade of grass and each star,
is an irreplaceable treasure,
an essential companion on this journey of love.

**All: Loving God, loving God, all creation calls you blessed,
 and so do we, and so do we.**

Loving God, as you lure the whole world into right relationship,
guide us with your Spirit
that we might not be only pilgrims on the earth,
but pilgrims with the earth, journeying home to you.

Open our hearts to understand
the intimate relationship that you have with all creation.
Only with this faith can we hope for tomorrow's children.

**All: Loving God, loving God, all creation calls you blessed,
 and so do we, and so do we.**

Sung Response: "Like a Rock" MV 92

Like a rock, like a rock,
God is under our feet.

Like the starry night sky
God is over our head.

Like the sun on the horizon
God is ever before.

Like the river runs to ocean,
our home is in God evermore.

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 2:4b-7 *The Inclusive Bible*

At the time when YHWH made the heavens and the earth, there was still no wild bush on the earth nor had any wild plant sprung up, for YHWH had not yet sent rain to the earth, and there was no human being to till the soil. Instead, a flow of water would well up from the ground and irrigate the soil.

So YHWH fashioned an earth creature out of clay, and blew into its nostrils the breath of life. And the earth creature became a living being.

Romans 8:26-28 *The Inclusive Bible*

The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness. For we don't know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit expresses our plea with groanings too deep for words. And God, who knows everything in our hearts, knows perfectly well what the Spirit is saying, because her intercessions for God's holy people are made according to the mind of God.

We know that God makes everything work together for the good of those who love God and have been called according to God's purpose.

Luke23:44-46 *The Inclusive Bible*

It was about noon, and darkness fell on the whole land until three in the afternoon, because of an eclipse of the sun. The curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two, and Jesus uttered a loud cry and said, "Abba, into your hands I commit my Spirit."

Saying this, Jesus breathed for the last time.

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir: "The Earth is Our Cradle"

Reflection: A Sky Full of Wonders

Hymn: "Like a River of Tears" MV 98

Like a river of tears your love pours upon us;
like a sunshine of blessing your grace will sustain us;
like a star studded sky your spirit shines o'er us,
renewing our spirits with courage and faith.

Like a bird in free flight by windows around us;
like a wind in the forest that breathes life among us;
like a phoenix that's rising from ashes around us,
renewing our spirits with vision and grace.

Like a pillar of cloud you promise to guide us;
like a bright fiery bush you come to speak to us;
like a calm cooling breeze your spirit breathes in us,
renewing our spirits with loving embrace.

Like a lover's caress your spirit revives us;
like a song of the soul you come to be with us;
like a prayer of the heart you heal and restore us,

renewing our spirits, the future to face.

Introduction to the Offering

Gift of Music: "If I Had a Hammer"

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: God, our Creator, you have given us so much to share.
We share our breath as we speak out for justice,
we share our hearts as we walk with compassion,
we share a part of our lives as we give financially.
Accept our offerings as an expression of our deep thanks
and our concern all for those in need,
and for all creation. Amen**

Prayers of the People

During our worship this morning, we will be writing our prayers of thanks and concern on paper 'flags' that will be hung in the sanctuary. If you would like to add your prayer and are participating on ZOOM, you could use the chat feature, and your prayer will be added, or you could email Rev. Joanne before or during the service minister@applewoodunited.ca

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: "Called by Earth and Sky" MV 135
Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,

called by earth and sky.

Precious these waters, endless seas,
deep ocean's dream, waters of healing,
rivers of rain, the wash of love again.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.

Precious this gift, the air we breathe;
wind born and free. Breath of the Spirit,
blow through this place, our gathering and our grace.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.

Precious these mountains, ancient sands;
vast fragile land. Seeds of our wakening,
rooted and strong, Creation's faithful song.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.

Precious the fire that lights our way,
bright dawning day. Fire of passion,
sorrow undone, our faith and justice one.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky, called by earth and sky,
called by earth and sky.

Commissioning /Blessing

Sung Amen VU967

Rev Joanne's Reflection

Before we begin to reflect together today, I invite us to share a deep breath or two together. With feet planted on the floor, as comfortably as you can, take a slow, deep, breath that completely fills your lungs. Let that breath out – slowly and completely. Take another, perhaps counting to five this time as you inhale and as you exhale.

Air – it surrounds us, it sustains us, filling our lungs with each breath. Without it we cannot survive, without clean air we sicken. It is part of the heavens, the sky, the atmosphere around us, and perhaps we sometimes think of it as empty. But the sky, the atmosphere, the very air we breathe is so very full!

Water is in the sky – clouds and rain, snow and sleet. Do you remember sticking out your tongue to catch a falling snowflake when you were younger? Lights fill the sky – sunlight in the daytime hours, stars planets and moon in the night sky, spectacular rainbows, northern lights, and lightning, and delight our eyes. Birds and other creatures move through the air, huge raptors like bald eagles, large carrion birds like the turkey vultures that live on the Niagara escarpment, small songbirds that fill our gardens, bees that pollinate the plants that grow our food.

The sky is also filled with what we cannot see, but know is present. Molecules of so many things, primarily nitrogen and oxygen, but also trace amounts of argon and helium, carbon dioxide and ozone are part of the air we breathe. Aerosols like pollen and dust are not always visible, but anyone with allergies can tell you they are present! Bio aerosols exist in the sky as well – tiny microbial organisms that actually travel through the atmosphere in breezes and winds, in rain or even in a sneeze.

Sometimes we can smell what is in the air but is unseen – the campfire aroma from wildfires, the unpleasant odours of sulphur or methane, or the fragrances of flowers. Living in an urban area, we often get whiffs of diesel fuel or vehicle exhaust, along with the smell of fresh cut grass or hot asphalt laid to repair our many roads and highways.

Sounds too travel through the atmosphere, some that can be heard for kilometres. Some are pleasant like bird song, some can be irritating like traffic sounds or sirens. Of course music exists in the ‘heavens’ as well – notes that float, melodies that soar, tunes that can hang in the air after the last chord is struck.

As people of faith, we also know that God’s Spirit swirls in and through the sky, in the heavens around us. In the second creation story in Genesis, which we heard today, God’s breath – the Spirit of life - created the first human one from simple dirt. The Spirit, as Jesus reminds us, that moves as it will, filling the spaces between our thoughts, between our heartbeats, and between the atoms that make up all of creation. With air and dirt God created humanity, and we spend all of our lives connected to these elements. Air filled with Spirit, with life, with sound and smell and wind and rain, and amazing sights. Dirt filled with life and possibility.

The breath of God – and the air we breathe – has been inhaled and exhaled by creatures of all kinds since life began. It may be composed of slightly different proportions of elements, but the air in the sky today is the same air that dinosaurs breathed, and that early humans breathed, and even that Jesus breathed. When we share together in worship, we share our breath as we sing, as we pray, and as we simply sit together. We perhaps have a different understanding of that shared breath or air since the pandemic. While we recognize that God’s Spirit as breath is shared, so can disease be spread.

The past year has certainly reminded us that the air can be vulnerable, and can carry choking smoke, ash, and dust. I spoke recently with my oldest son, who lives on Vancouver Island, and while there are no fires close to his home in this record-breaking wildfire season, the smoke still drifts in, making breathing more difficult, blurry the view of mountains and hills. He told me that the local pharmacist remarked that they were having difficulty keeping breathing medications – puffers – in stock, and were not surprised at all that my son had used three times the usual amount of medication to control his asthma. Even here in Mississauga, our air quality has been affected by fires burning hundreds of kilometres away.

Just like that Spirit that hovered over the waters of all creation, the air and atmosphere that protects us from the cold and vacuum of space is shared with the entire planet. We cannot truly escape the poor air quality in locations like Beijing, or California, or Bangladesh, because there are no barriers between those places and where we call home.

Call to care for creation includes the care of the skies, and perhaps becoming more aware of how our lives and lifestyles affect the air we all must breathe. Electric vehicles, with lower emissions, help to care for the air. The dismantling of coal-fired electricity plants helped to clean some air. The reduced use of aerosols for personal care and even cooking made an impact. We need to care about our shared atmosphere, we need to care about the air we breathe, and the sky that surrounds us. If we do not, the earth will let us know, as it has already.

We are reminded in our last scripture today that the skies are not separate from God, and God's ways. We are reminded that at the moment of Jesus' death, the earth became dark and still – the heavens themselves marking his death, just as they celebrated his birth with a star in the sky.

Let us do all we can to share breath that is full of Spirit, full of our care and concern, but full of promise for all of God's creation. Amen.