

Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Hybrid Worship for September 24, 2023
(*please stand body or spirit
bold print is for all)

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: "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.

*** Call to Worship and Opening Prayer**

One: God's love roots us,
All: we stand knee-deep in the soil of loving community.
One: God's grace grounds us,
All: hope is planted deep within us.
One: God's world nourishes and supports us,
All: and so we grow in faith, in compassion for all.
One: And so we pray as God's rooted and grounded people:
This we know: the earth does not belong to us,
All: we belong to the earth.
One: This we know: all things are connected,
All: like the blood that unites one family.
One: This we know: we did not weave the web of life,
All: we are merely a strand in it.
One: This we know: whatever we do to the web of life,
All: we do to ourselves.
One: Let us give thanks for the gift of creation,
All: let us give thanks that all things hold together in Christ.
Iona Community

*** Opening Hymn:** “It’s A Song of Praise to the Maker” MV 30

It’s a song of praise to the Maker,
the thrush sings high in the tree.
It’s a song of praise to the Maker,
the gray whale sings in the sea,

and by the Spirit you and I can
join our voice to the holy cry
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

It’s a call of life to the Giver
when waves and waterfalls roar.
It’s a call of life to the Giver
when high tides break on the shore,

and by the Spirit you and I can
join our voice to the holy cry
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

It’s a hymn of love to the Lover;
the bumblebees hum along.
It’s a hymn of love to the Lover;
the summer breeze joins the song

and by the Spirit you and I can
join our voice to the holy cry
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

It’s the chorus of all creation;
it’s sung by all living things.
Its’ the chorus of all creation;
a song the universe sings,

and by the Spirit you and I can
join our voice to the holy cry
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: “Re-imagining Dirt”

We experience soil in different ways, especially at different seasons of the year and of our lives.

We are all invited to sit in a moment of silence, with feet firmly planted, imagining that the soles of our feet are indeed connected to the soil – to the ground. Imagine that your feet can sense the minerals and nutrients in the soil under our church building. Imagine that you can sense the multitude of living things creeping and crawling and burrowing under your feet. Imagine that you can feel the long-buried

story of the land, when this portion of our neighbourhood was under water, when very different plants grew here, and very different sorts of animals grew and flourished here.

Take a moment to remember or imagine the smell of rich spring soil, or the aroma of a sandy ocean beach, the fragrance of a freshly-sown farm field, or the sticky-sweet smell of a bog or swamp, and the near-rot scent of leaves mostly decomposed to make more soil.

Imagine yourself in your childhood body, squishing mud between your toes, or walking barefoot on the sand. Imagine how cool that mud feels; imagine how hot the sand can be in the sun.

Remember a time when you held dirt in your hands – working in your garden or playing with a child or grandchild, at graveside heaping dirt on the casket of a friend or loved one.

Now think about the dirt and soil in our world that is not healthy – contaminated with chemicals from industry – some of those places right here in our city -stripped of nutrients by over-farming and over use, drenched in flood or dried out in drought, trampled by refugees in their struggle to live in camps, sown with land mines and the detritus of war.

Imagine that through our actions – what we learn, what we say, what we share – we can return the soil of the earth to health and wholeness, we can work to share land and understand that it supports all life, all humanity, all plants and living things. We can remember that it is God’s gift to us, and that it is our source, and to it we will eventually return.

Imagine you can feel and experience all of that in the earth that grounds us and sustains us. Amen

Sung Response: “O Beautiful Gaia” MV 41 Chorus, verse one, chorus

O beautiful Gaia, O Gaia calling us home.

O beautiful Gaia, calling us on.

Soil yielding its harvest, O, Gaia, calling us home.

Soil, yielding its harvest, calling us on.

O beautiful Gaia, O Gaia calling us home.

O beautiful Gaia, calling us on.

Scripture Readings:

Romans 1:18-22a *The Inclusive Bible*

At the same time, however, God’s passionate and just anger is also being revealed; it rages from heaven against all of humankind’s willful impiety and refusal to honour God, against the injustices committed by people who actively suppress the truth through injustice.

For what is knowledgeable about God is plain and obvious to everyone, indeed, it is God who has made it obvious to them. Though invisible to the eye, God’s eternal power and divinity have been seen since

the creation of the universe, understood and clearly visible in all of nature. Humankind is, therefore, without excuse.

For although they knew God, they didn't give God honour or praise and never even said, "thank you"; instead, their reasoning became empty and inept, and their undiscerning hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.

Matthew 13:1-9 *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!"

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir: "Morning Has Broken"

Reflection: Holy Ground – let's get dirty

*** Hymn:** "Soil of God, You and I" MV 174

Soil of God, you and I, stand ready to bear
seeds of faith nourished by God's tender care.
Growing in everyone for here God is found.
All stand together, we are Holy ground.

Soil of God, you and I, now ready to be
part of God's promise for others to see.
Open to everyone for here God is found.
All stand together, we are Holy ground.

Soil of God, you and I, now called to rebirth
joining as partners will all of the earth.
Living in harmony for here God is found.
All stand together, this is Holy ground.

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: Loving Creator God, we are richly nourished in the soil of your love.

Accept our gifts today, symbols of our gratitude and commitment.

**May they help to create a firm grounding for the work of justice
and compassion in our world. Amen**

Prayers of the People *from Celebrate God's Presence, The United Church of Canada*

Creator God, you breathe your being into all creation,

and set us in a garden of wonder and delight.

Today you call us: "Where are you; what have you done?"

silent prayer for creation

We hide in utter shame, for we are naked before you.

We violate the earth and plunder it.

We seek to own what is not ours, but yours.

Forgive us, Creator God, and reconcile us to your creation.

O God of love, you ask that we share the gifts of creation

with all your peoples, of varying cultures, races, colours.

Today you ask us: "Where is your brother, your sister?"

silent prayer for others

We hide ourselves in shame and fear.

Poverty, hunger, hatred, and war rule the earth.

Refugees, all who are oppressed,

and all who are voiceless cry out to you.

Forgive us, God of love,

and reconcile us to yourself and to one another.

Teach us, God of love,

that the earth and its fullness is yours,

the world and those who dwell in it.

Call us to safeguard the gift of life. Amen.

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: "You Shall Go Out with Joy" VU 884**

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace;
the mountains and the hills
will break forth before you;
there'll be shouts of joy,
and all the trees of the field
will clap, will clap their hands!

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands,
(clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands,
(clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands
(clap, clap)
while you go out with joy.

*** Commissioning /Blessing**

*** Sung Amen VU 969**

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

“Let’s get dirty” is probably not the invitation you might have expected when thinking about worship this morning. Unless we are gardening, or we are farmers, or going off-roading in a sport vehicle of some kind, or perhaps playing with kids or grandkids, we don’t generally mess about with dirt. Certainly we don’t usually get too messy in our worship services, and I’m not really suggesting that we all go out and play in the dirt today instead of sharing a sermon and prayers and hymns. I do think we could spend a moment thinking about our relationship to the land – to the soil and the sand, to the rocks and minerals, and all that lies beneath our feet.

We are, after all, creatures of the dirt – as we read last week from the book of Genesis, created by God’s breath and clay. Some of minerals we find in the ground are also found in our bodies; even some of the bacteria that live in dirt also live in our intestinal tracts. We are land-creatures, made to thrive on solid ground, even though we use the waters of the earth for work or recreation.

Every week in worship we read a land acknowledgment, remembering that the very ground on which we live and work and worship has been home to other people for millennia. Land which nourished and supported and was also respected and honoured by the Indigenous peoples who called this place home. Land which was once covered by water, and is now full of fossils of the creatures that swam those seas, made of shale and sandstone, limestone and covered with rich soil and clay.

How remarkable is the earth beneath our feet! In some places, huge dinosaur fossils have been unearthed – in other deep places precious gems and stones were created. Archaeological exploration has uncovered history and story buried in the ground. Many of you may remember Jill Heinerth’s visit to Applewood, and her stories of diving in caves found deep underground. The substance of living things that existed millions of years ago still reside in the ground – extracted by us to make fuel, and petrochemicals. Even though they are not a renewable resource, they still provide up to 80% of the world’s energy.

Paul wrote to the Christian community in Rome that much of God’s knowledge and wonder is hidden to the eye – like the treasures stored in the earth – but that God’s power and divinity are made clear through nature – like the treasures stored in the earth! We have been given a remarkable gift in the land on which we walk, and we are a part of it as surely as it becomes a part of us. “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” says God to Adam in the creation story. At funerals and burials we often use the phrase, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

In our modern and urban lives, we may need to be reminded of our dependence on the earth – whether it is soil for growing the crops we need to eat, sandy beaches to warm our feet and calm our spirits, or metals and fuels torn from the earth which provide our lifestyles. In Jesus’ time, those who followed him and who listened to his teachings were more intimately connected with the ground in their everyday lives. When he told this parable – one that we shared during our summer lectionary readings as well, he listeners would have had much more intimate contact with all those types of soil, encountering them often as they walked through their lives.

Perhaps, as we contemplate the wonders and the treasures of the ground, we might take time to notice the dirt around us. What treasures does it hold? How do we feel about the spreading concrete and asphalt of our community as it grows? How do we feel about earth that has been poisoned by our own actions? Especially, we might ask ourselves if we find God in the dirt – in the miracle of growing plants

and trees, in the wonder of nutrients and earth-burrowing creatures, in the beauty of underground caves and caverns, in the gift of land and all that it means.

We might ask each other if we are ready to 'get dirty' – to be immersed in God's grounding love, to be smeared with God's messages of justice and peace which are not always tidy, and take them to share with the world.

Amen

The full sermon will be available by recording on our website next week