

**Applewood United Church**  
**An Affirming Community**  
**Hybrid Worship for September 3, 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:** "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.

**Call to Worship and Opening Prayer**

One: God is calling us to step out into the world,

**All: following the path of the Spirit,**

One: going outside our 'comfort zones',

**All: encountering the sacred in unexpected places.**

One: God is calling us to gather here, in this familiar virtual or physical space,

**All: attentive to the way of the Spirit,**

One: sometimes worshiping outside what is comfortable,

**All: encountering the sacred in the familiar.**

One: God is here, with God's people,

**All: thanks be to God.**

One: Let's join our voices in prayer:

**All: Surprising God, you are present in burning bushes,**

**in the breath of a newborn baby,**

**in the blaze of a summer sunset,**

**in the tenderness of hands holding hands.**

**Be with us as we worship today,**

**and as we step out into our lives in the coming days.**

**Remind us that we walk on holy ground whenever**

**we walk with you. Amen**

**Opening Hymn: "God Is Here" VU 389**

God is here! As we your people  
meet to offer praise and prayer,  
may we find in fuller measure  
what it is in Christ we share.  
Here, as in the world around us,  
all our varied skills and arts  
wait the coming of the Spirit  
into open minds and hearts.

Here are symbols to remind us  
of our lifelong need of grace;  
here are table, font, and pulpit;  
here the cross has central place.  
Here in honesty of preaching,  
here in silence, as in speech,  
here, in newness and renewal,  
God the Spirit comes to each.

Here our children find a welcome  
in the Shepherd's flock and fold;  
here as bread and wine are taken,  
Christ sustains us, as of old.  
Here the servants of the Servant  
seek in worship to explore  
what it means in daily living  
to believe and to adore.

God of all, of church and kingdom,  
in an age of change and doubt  
keep us faithful to the gospel;  
help us work your purpose out.  
Here, in this day's dedication,  
all we have to give, receive;  
we, who cannot live without you,  
we adore you! We believe!

**Prayer for Reflection and Revelation:** *by Thom M. Shuman <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>  
adapted and used with permission*

When we would rush  
to get all our to-dos done,  
you call to us to turn

and notice your compassion  
burning (but not reduced to ashes)  
for those living in misery.  
When we hesitate,  
you ask us to remove  
all we think protects us from  
the fire of your justice,  
so we can draw closer  
to your heart's warmth.  
YOU ARE the One we search for,  
God of all held in bondage.

When we become  
stumbling blocks to you,  
you polish our stony resistance  
so we can become smooth pebbles  
on the path to your kingdom.  
When we would tell you  
how we think you should  
bring about your hopes and dreams,  
you show us your heart,  
broken for the lost and the last,  
so we will look to their needs  
rather than thinking about our own.  
YOU ARE the One  
who leads us to freedom,  
Servant of the poor.

When we believe we cannot speak  
about your peace and hopes,  
you give us words  
which spill out of our hearts.  
When we put our palms  
over our eyes, afraid to look  
at the suffering around us,  
you fill our hands with grace,  
sending us to serve your children.  
YOU ARE the One who  
teaches us new ways,  
Impassioned Spirit.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
YOU ARE WHO YOU ARE,  
and you are with us.

**Sung Response:** “God Says” MV 172 verses 1 and 3

God says, "Be still so you may hear  
the words I whisper in your ear.  
If you will listen, you will know,  
I'm with you always where you go."

God says, "Come here! I need your voice.  
Please teach my people to rejoice.  
In who you are, in what you do,  
your life will show my love for you."

**Scripture Readings:**

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock deep into the wilderness, Moses came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

The messenger from YHWH appeared to Moses in a blazing fire from the midst of a thornbush, Moses saw – “The bush is ablaze with fire, and yet it isn’t consumed!” Moses said, “Let me go over and look at this remarkable sight – and see why the bush doesn’t burn up!”

When YHWH saw Moses coming to look more closely, God called to him from the midst of the bush: “Moses! Moses!”

Moses answered, “I am here.”

God said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground!”

“I am the God of your ancestors,” the voice continued, “the God of Sarah and Abraham, the God of Rebecca and Isaac, the God of Leah and Rachel and Jacob!”

Moses hid his face, afraid to look at the Holy One.

Then YHWH said, “I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt; I have heard their cries under those who oppress them; I have felt their sufferings. Now I have come down to rescue them from the hand of Egypt, out of their place of suffering, and bring them to a place that is wide and fertile, a land flowing with milk and honey – the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the children of Israel has reached me, and I have watched how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Now, go! I will send you to Pharaoh, to bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

God answered, “I will be with you, and this is the sign by which you will know that it is I who have sent you: after you bring my people out of Egypt, you will all worship at this very mountain.”

“But,” Moses said, “when I go to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is this god’s name?’ what am I to tell them?”

God replied, “I AM AS I AM. This is what you will tell the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Matthew 16:21–23

From that time on, Jesus began to explain to the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, to suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and religious scholars, and that he must be killed, and on the third day raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Rabbi!” he said. “This will never happen to you.”

Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get yourself behind me, you Satan! You are trying to make me stumble and fall. You’re setting your mind not on the things of God, but of mortals.”

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection:** Finding Holy Ground

**Hymn:** “As A Fire is Meant for Burning” VU 578

As a fire is meant for burning  
with a bright and warming flame,  
so the church is meant for mission,  
giving glory to God’s name.  
Not to preach our creeds or customs,  
but to build a bridge of care,  
we join hands across the nations,  
finding neighbours everywhere.

We are learners; we are teachers;  
we are pilgrims on the way.  
We are seekers; we are givers;  
we are vessels made of clay.  
By our gentle, loving actions,  
we would show that Christ is light.  
In a humble, listening Spirit,  
we would live to God’s delight.

As a green bud in the springtime  
is the sign of life renewed,  
so may we be signs of oneness  
’mid earth’s peoples, many hued.  
As a rainbow lights the heavens  
when a storm is past and gone,

may our lives reflect the radiance  
of God's new and glorious dawn

### **Introduction to the Offering**

**Gift of Music:** "I'm Gonna Shout, Shout"

**Hymn of Dedication:** "What Can I Do?" MV 191  
What can I do? What can I bring?  
What can I say? What can I sing?  
I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.  
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

### **Offering Prayer:**

**All: Generous God, remind us that we stand on holy ground  
when we walk with the lonely,  
work beside those seeking justice,  
bring hope to the forgotten,  
and share from our abundance with those who have nothing.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.**

**Sacrament of Communion**      *Liturgy by Thom M. Shuman <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>  
adapted and used with permission*

**One:** May the God of burning bushes be with you!

**All: And also with you!**

**One:** People of God, offer your hearts to God,  
who calls to you from the mystery of grace.

**All: We turn aside from our worries to open ourselves  
to the One who calls us to new life.**

**One:** Children of God, remember all the joy and wonder  
which has been done for you.

**All: We will lift our voices in praise to the One who is  
beyond all imagining.**

**One:** In a moment, creation began,  
and from that time on, God of Freedom,  
you began to pour out  
your goodness and genuine love.  
Earth laughed with flowers  
and rejoiced with sunrises.  
You shaped us in your image  
and began to show us all

you wanted to give us.  
But chasing after the temptations  
and seductions of the world,  
we tripped over the stumbling blocks  
of sin and death, falling flat  
on our fears and doubts.

Two: Observing our misery in such living,  
you sent the prophets  
to call us back to you,  
but we did not hear their cries.  
Knowing we would continue  
to suffer and lose our way,  
you sent Jesus to come  
and deliver us from our slavery.

Joining our voices with those  
who have faithfully followed,  
and with those who stumbled along the way,  
we call on your name, singing praises to you:

**All (sung): MV 203**

**O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space,  
All earth and sea and sky above  
bear witness to your grace.  
Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise.  
And blessed is the one who comes  
and bears your name always.**

One: Holy are you, Listener of cries in the night,  
and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Child.  
Hearing the pain of your heart,  
he came to speak of your hopes;  
seeing the brokenness of our relationships,  
he came to make us whole;  
knowing our fear of death,  
he came to defeat its power;  
aware of what it would cost him,  
he journeyed to Jerusalem  
to embrace suffering and heartache;  
hating evil so much  
he was willing to let it believe

it had won the battle,  
until he burst from the grave  
bringing life for all  
even as you raised him from the dead.

Two: We remember that when Jesus ate one last meal with his friends,  
he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it,  
he broke it and gave it to them, saying:  
“Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.  
Each time you do this, remember me.”

One: Then, he took a cup, and after giving thanks,  
passed it to his friends, saying:  
“Drink. This cup that is poured out for you  
is the promise of God, made in my blood.  
Whenever you drink it, remember me.”

Two: Remembering his wonderful works,  
recalling his miracles, his words, his life,  
we speak of that mystery we know as faith:

**All: Christ rejoices with us,  
Christ weeps with us,  
Christ died for us,  
Christ was raised for us.**

One: As we prepare to gather around  
your Table, God of Love,  
pour out your Spirit upon us,  
and on the gifts of the bread and cup.  
Feed us on the rich food  
of your forgiveness and grace,  
so we might go forth  
to feed all those we only know  
by the name 'enemy.'  
Quench our thirst for power  
with the sweet wine of your servanthood,  
so we might choose  
honor over fame,  
humility over pride,  
forgiveness over vengeance,  
and in so doing,



lose ourselves in your life  
of denial and service,  
giving ourselves to others,  
thus returning your love for us.

And when all moments come to an end,  
and the time has come to gather around  
that great feast in heaven,  
there will be no enemy, no them, no us -  
just our siblings from every time and place joining  
hearts and voices in singing your praise,  
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

Two: At this time, we also remember all those  
with whom you would have us share your feast.  
We pray for all who are in sorrow or in pain . . .  
all who are ill or alone . . .  
All who live with fear, oppression, or hunger . . .  
all whom the world counts as last and least . . . .  
We pray for your church and its varied ministries . . .  
for the earth, and the fragile web of life we share . . .  
for our families and friends . . . .

**The Lord's Prayer (sung) VU 960**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive them that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.

**Breaking the Bread and Filling the Cup**

*(If you are worshipping in the sanctuary, you may come forward to receive the elements. If you prefer to stay seated, they will be brought to you. If you are participating on ZOOM, this would be the time to take bread and juice, and if with another you could serve each other with the words "Jesus Christ the bread of life" and "Jesus Christ the true vine.")*

**Prayer after Communion:**

**All: Life-giving God,  
may we, who share Christ's body, live his risen life;  
we, who drink his cup, bring new life to others;  
we, whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.**

**Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,  
so that we and all your children shall be free,  
and all creation will live to praise your name.  
Amen.**

**Closing Hymn:** "Hymn for Labour Day" (*Tune VU 333*)

All our work and all our being  
come from you, most gracious God.  
Ev'ry task which lies before us  
is Creator's will outpoured.  
Help us as we build your kin-dom  
know we labor not in vain;  
give us sure and deep conviction  
for the tasks that you ordain.  
Some may nurture those who hunger,  
tend and heal the broken heart;  
set our flagging spirits dancing,  
spark our vision through their art.  
Others teach and offer counsel,  
bear life's burdens, ease its care;  
strive for justice, peace, and freedom  
for all people ev'rywhere.

Let us labor in the knowledge  
that no task can be too small;  
that the God who stretched the heavens  
no less shaped the least of all.  
Give us strength, God, to accomplish  
what you set our hands to do,  
that by serving those around us,  
we return the gift to you.

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## Commissioning /Blessing

Sung Amen    VU967

### Rev. Joanne's Reflection:

I love a good dramatic scene – larger than life characters, some conflict or excitement, heightened emotions all add up to a gripping story. Both of our scripture readings this week are full of drama. Moses encountering God and changing the course of his life, Jesus and Peter interacting with one another intensely, are both emotional and note worthy stories. Many folk outside our faith tradition are familiar with lines from these scriptures; God's name – "I AM THAT I AM", and Jesus' rebuke to Peter (often quoted from the King James Bible) "Get thee behind me, Satan" are part of popular culture, even if those same folk might not know exactly what their biblical context would be.

As usual when I read the story of Moses and the burning bush, my imagination is completely captured by this scene. What was Moses thinking, approaching this phenomenon when he is completely alone except for the sheep he is tending? Was it just curiosity that drew him to the thorn bush? Did he have any sense of the sacredness of the space – the holiness of the ground he walked upon?

If you have seen the epic Cecil B. Demille movie *The Ten Commandments* you might recall that Charlton Heston's Moses doesn't approach the bush too closely, and has his sandals off his almost before he is told he should do so, with God's deep and resonant voice calling his name and speaking the words of Exodus from the King James bible. The special affects of the bush that burns but does not consume, although remarkable in 1956 perhaps, do not match what my imagination paints, do not convey to me a sense of what I still feel is the utter mystery of God's presence in this scene.

Something that has always captured my attention was the notion of that holy ground, and how a place or space can become a location that we would identify as holy or sacred. In Moses' story, it seems to be God's presence in the bush that marks the area as holy ground, and it is the only time this phrase is used in the bible. Yet I have heard folk speak of sacred space, of holy ground, so how might we define it for ourselves? Are there places you have visited that seem to be holy ground to you? I have certainly heard travelers describe great cathedrals as holy spaces, or locations in the Holy Land like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as particularly sacred.

I think that if we look once again at the story of Moses' encounter, we find that the ground became holy when Moses was made aware of God's presence. And I believe that any ground – any space – can be holy ground when we too become aware that God is there. The sanctuary can be holy ground, our homes and gardens, our favourite places to walk or stroll, can all be holy ground for us is that is where we can meet God, or acknowledge that God is present.

And what does it look or feel like to encounter God? I imagine we have not had a theophany (manifestation of God) like Moses did, where God spoke to him plainly, ordered him directly, and was both a physical and spiritual presence. Perhaps though, God is present in our curiosity – drawing us to look more closely at the patterns on a butterfly's wings, or the shape of the clouds in the sky, or to take a deeper breath of air and notice all the fragrances of city living within it. God can be present for us in those patterns, in those shapes, in those odours, reminding us of the wonders of creation, or the richness of imagination, or our shared life with all those around us.

Perhaps we should take off our shoes, as Moses did, not just as a sign of respect, but in order to be more closely connected to the holy ground that surrounds us in our lives. Take off our shoes and feel the

grass tickle our feet, perhaps as we did when we were children, and grow our joy and delight. Take off our shoes and imagine what it would be like to have no shoes at all, and grow in compassion. Take off our shoes and feel vulnerable, and grow in humility. Take off our shoes and perhaps feel uncomfortable for a moment. Take off our shoes and find our own holy ground – a space in which we can feel God’s presence, and know that we are each called to God’s purposes of love and justice, of growth and commitment to serving others and being in relationship with the world around us.

And when someone tells you to put those shoes back on, to insulate yourself from God’s way or to deny that call, remember Jesus’ reaction to Peter. Essentially he said get behind me, if you would tempt me from the path, get out of my sight if you are not comfortable with my relationship with God. Because the holy, nourishing, mysterious ground of God is for each of us to find and value in our own way, and in our own time.

May you find your holy ground today. Amen