

**Applewood United Church**  
**An Affirming Community**  
**Hybrid Worship for October 15, 2023**

(\*please stand in body or in 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:** “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**

One: You invite us to worship, O God, and we rejoice!

**All: We are able to leave the anxieties of our daily lives behind.**

One: You invite us to worship, O God, and we give thanks!

**All: We realize the full extent of your wonderful gifts.**

One: You invite us to worship, O God, and we remember!

**All: We are aware of your love, so graciously shown in Jesus Christ.**

One: You invite us to worship, O God, and we respond!

**All: We are ready to act compassionately and justly, in Christ’s name.**

**\* Opening Prayer:**

One: O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

**All: there in times of joy, there when the testing times come.**

One: O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

**All: there when apathy grips us, there when enthusiasm is ours.**

One: O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

**All: there in our solitary moments, there when we share in faith community.**

One: O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

**All: there as we stay in familiar territory, there as we venture and risk.**

**Your love never leaves us! Amen**

*From “Prayers to Share” by David Sparks copyright 2004*

**\* Opening Hymn: “Come Let Us Sing” VU 222**

Come, let us sing to the Lord our song,  
we have stood silently too long;  
surely the Lord deserves our praise,  
so joyfully thank God for our days.

O thirsty soul, come drink at the well;  
God's living waters will never fail.  
Surely the Lord will help you to stand,  
strengthened and comforted by God's hand.

You dwell among us and cause us to pray,  
and walk with each other following your way;  
our precious brothers and sisters will grow  
in the fulfilling love they know.

Deserts shall bloom and mountains shall sing  
to the desire of all living things.  
Come, all you creatures, high and low,  
let your praises endlessly flow.

**Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: “He Was A Storyteller” by Ruth Burgess**

He was a storyteller,  
he drew pictures with words:  
a tiny seed growing into a huge tree  
a lamp under a bed  
a lost sheep crying.  
Buckets of fish  
hungry birds gobbling up corn  
a house built on a rock  
workmen grumbling ...

He was a storyteller,  
and he told great stories:  
Once there was a traveller ... and the bandits attacked him ...  
One day a king threw a great banquet ... and no one turned up ...  
In a certain town there was a judge ... and there was also a widow ...  
There was this man ... and he had two sons ... and they were very different ...

He was a storyteller,  
and he asked his listeners questions:

Who was neighbour to this man?  
Why do you call me good?  
What do you think the owner of the vineyard would do?  
Are you jealous because God is generous?

He was a storyteller,  
and he knew how to deliver punchlines that stuck in your memory:  
No servant can be the slave of two masters.  
Whatever is hidden will be brought out into the open.  
Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me.  
Your heart will always be where your riches are.

He was a storyteller,  
with words he could draw pictures;  
and people listened  
and people remembered  
and some of them followed him.

They called him  
the Word of God.

**Sung Response:** “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” VU 400

Lord, listen to your children praying,  
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;  
Lord, listen to your children praying,  
send us love, send us power, send us grace!

**Scripture Readings:**

Philippians 4:1-9      *NRSV*

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of

praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 22:1-14      *NRSV*

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.” But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.’

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir: "Bridge of Light"

Reflection: Making Comparisons

\* **Hymn:** “If You Will Trust in God to Guide You” VU 286

If you will trust in God to guide you,  
and hope in God through all your ways,  
God will give strength, whatever betide you,  
and bear you through the evil days.  
Who trusts in God's unchanging love  
builds on the rock that will not move.

God will embrace your pain and weeping,  
your helpless anger and distress.  
If you are in God's care and keeping,  
in sorrow will God love you less?  
For Christ, who took for you a cross,  
will bring you safe through every loss.

Sing, pray, and keep God's ways unswerving;

so do your own part faithfully,  
and trust God's word; though undeserving,  
you'll find God's promise true to be.  
God never will forsake in need  
the soul that trusts in God indeed.

### **Introduction to the Offering**

#### **Gift of Music**

**\* 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 you give.

**\* Offering Prayer:**

**All: We bring our gifts to you, God.  
Here is the work of our hands,  
and here is the love of our hearts.  
Accept them and use them,  
through Jesus who is your great gift to us.  
Amen**

#### **Prayers of the People**

Loving and Comforting God,  
today we bring our thanks and our concerns,  
remembering Paul's words:

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We are grateful, God, that we are free to gather together,  
safe in our church sanctuary or in our homes,  
safe from much of the trouble in the world.

We are thankful for the beauty of this season, as leaves continue to change and fall.  
We are thankful for our friends and families and communities.

With grateful hearts, Gracious God,  
we pray for the faithful all over the world,  
in our own Christian tradition, and our Muslim and Jewish siblings,  
that all who love you may be united in your service.

We pray for the church . . . .

One: God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your love, answer.**

We pray for the peoples and leaders of the nations,  
that they may be reconciled one to another  
in pursuit of your justice and peace.

We pray for the world . . . .

One: God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your love, answer.**

We pray for all who suffer from prejudice, greed or violence,  
that the heart of humanity may warm with your tenderness.

We pray especially for all prisoners of politics or religion,  
and for all refugees.

We remember those who are suffering in Israel, Gaza, and every corner  
of the Middle East who are living with grief and dread.

We pray for peace and justice . . . .

One: God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your love, answer.**

We pray for all in need  
by reason of famine, flood or earthquake,  
that they may know the hope of your faithfulness  
through the help of others.

One: God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your love, answer.**

We pray for the land, the sea, and the sky,  
that we may live with respect in creation  
and use your gifts with reverence.

We pray for the earth . . . .

One: God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your love, answer.**

We pray for all who suffer the pain of sickness,  
loneliness, fear or loss,  
that those whose names are in our hearts,  
in the hearts of others,  
or known to you alone,  
may receive strength and courage.

We pray for those in need . . . .

One: God, hear our prayer.

**All: And in your love, answer.**

God of compassion,  
into your hands we commend all for whom we pray,  
trusting in your mercy, now and forever.  
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: "My Soul Cries Out" MV 120 Verses 1 and 4**

1. My soul cries out with a joyful shout  
that the God of my heart is great,  
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things  
that you bring to the ones who wait.

You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,  
and my weakness you did not spurn,  
So from east to west shall my name be blest.  
Could the world be about to turn?

Refrain:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.  
Let the fires of your justice burn.  
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,  
and the world is about to turn.

4. Though the nations rage from age to age,  
we remember who holds us fast:  
God's mercy must deliver us  
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.

This saving word that our forebears heard  
is the promise which holds us bound,

'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,  
who is turning the world around.

Refrain:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.  
Let the fires of your justice burn.  
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,  
and the world is about to turn.

**\* Commissioning /Blessing**

**Choir:** “A Choral Benediction”

Rev. Joanne's Reflection:

Once upon a time, there were people who believed the earth was essentially flat. In other times, there was widespread belief that mental or physical illness could be caused by demons, or by our own bad behaviour. Even in my lifetime, advances in understanding have changed the way we think dinosaurs looked and behaved, and changed the designation of the planet Pluto to that of a dwarf planet. As our knowledge grows, we have the opportunity to change our perspectives and our understanding.

There have been advances in our understanding of scripture as well. We now know that the King James Version of the bible contained many inaccuracies in translation, including the deletion of women's names from the text, or changing female names to male ones. In ancient Hebrew, there were no gendered pronouns, so references to God as 'he' would not reflect the language used when the Hebrew Scriptures were actually written down.

That advance in understanding might be applied to our gospel reading for today. This has often been seen as a challenging text – and it is. Traditional interpretations have cast God in the role of the king, the son/bridegroom as Jesus, the wedding feast is the Messianic banquet, the rejected and/or murdered slaves are the Old Testament prophets, and those guests who refused to attend the wedding are God's 'chosen people,' the Israelites. Those last minute guests who come in off the streets to fill the banquet hall instead are seen to be us, the gentiles. The destruction of the city by God is interpreted as the representing the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

This way of explaining the parable is problematic for me, for a few reasons. First, likening God to a king who would destroy a city or cast a guest “into the outer darkness” does not seem to reflect the God of love and compassion that Jesus taught about. This God that is enraged by those who have no time to attend the wedding, that acts with violence and judgement, does not represent the God that forgives, that endures, that never stops reaching out to us, that sends the Holy Spirit into our lives, that sent Jesus to be with us.

Then we have the issue of the destruction of the city. If it, as biblical scholars often note, is representing the destruction of the temple, then these words were not likely spoken by Jesus who lived decades before that event. They may very well be Matthew's words, and Matthew's analysis, but I can't reconcile that analysis with Jesus' teaching. I can't see God celebrating Jesus by punishing those who do not follow him, or planning to destroy the heart of the Jewish community in first century Jerusalem.



And that leads me to my last issue with the traditional interpretation of this passage. It paints the Israelite people in a very negative light. It seems to suggest that the Jewish people get everything wrong, and lose their coveted place as God's people, and then must take a backseat to the more faithful and more deserving (gentile) church. This is a dangerous and wounding angle on the story — one that perpetuates anti-Semitism, and seeks to put the Christian faith somehow 'above' the Jewish faith from which we come. Jesus may have challenged authorities, he may have meant to disturb those who felt a little too comfortable, or too complacent in their faith. I cannot believe that his words were meant to dismiss his own faith tradition.

So how might we interpret this parable in a new way? How might we interpret Jesus' words for our time? I would suggest we begin as Jesus instructs us, and COMPARE the kin-dom of heaven and God's reign to the king in this story. The king in this story wants to celebrate, and invites many to the banquet, just as God invites many to the banquet of life. Many will not come, just as many in the past did not heed the invitations of the prophets to live in God's way, and sometimes the messengers were met with violence. The retaliation by the king sounds much more like the behaviour of the rulers of Jesus' time, angry and violent, compared to God who continued to reach out to the people, sending his own Beloved One to walk with them. When we compare the persistent, patient God to the king, we may see that our own impatience and lack of compassion can ultimately end in violence against others.

The impatient king wants guests, so he instructs his workers to just bring anyone in — the good and the bad, calling those who did not come 'unworthy'. God also invites all, as I mentioned, but not as a last resort, not as some way to just 'fill seats' in the kin-dom, and not by calling some 'unworthy'. By comparison, God's invitation is a genuine call to be part of God's family, to experience radical welcome and hospitality, to know forgiveness and acceptance.

The last act of the king is, for me, the least God-like. The judgemental king sees a guest just brought in from the street that does not seem to be attired properly, and he is cast out into the darkness, into suffering and perhaps even death. What if that ill-dressed guest is seen to be Jesus? The one who does not seem to 'fit' in the celebrations of the powerful? The one who will not simply put on the robe of compliance? He was the one cast out by those with power, he was the one sent to darkness, but ultimately became the Light of the world.

Where are we to see ourselves in this parable today? Are we like the ones who have put aside our relationship with God to pursue other interests? Do we take God's invitation to community, to celebration, for granted? Are we like the king, ready to judge others as unworthy, angry when our friends and neighbours do not want to join us in faith, or disagree with our perspective? Are we present at God's banquet because we have chosen to come, or have we just arrived with everyone else? Do we truly welcome all in our faith community, or are we quick to want to banish those who are different?

We cannot know how the chief priests and Pharisees responded to Jesus' words, although Matthew tells us that they realized Jesus was talking about them somehow, and that they began their plots to trap Jesus 'by his speech' after hearing this parable. It seems to have disturbed them, and like all of Jesus' teachings, it should also disturb us, disturb our ways of thinking, and lead us to new revelations about our relationship with God, our willingness to answer God's invitation, and God's love for us.

May we continue to find new ways to hear the story of Jesus, and the parables and teachings that he shared, that will bring us challenge as well as comfort, questions as well as hope, and searching as well as inspiration. Amen