**ST. ANDREW’S UNITED CHURCH**



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**Ministers: The people of St. Andrew’s**

**Pastor: Rev.Cheryl Bolton**

**Ministry of Music: Brian and Lynn Sloan/Merna Edison**

**January 29th, 2023**

**WE GATHER**

**Welcome**

Good morning and welcome! We come to worship theCreator of all, who calls us into community, to work together as one body. May God be with us today as we join our hearts and voices to bring praise to the Holy One who have perfectly created each of us. Help us to see past our perceived imperfections to see the beauty God created in us and in the world. May God accept the praise of our family as we reach out to God, and each other, in worship and adoration. Amen.

**Announcements**

**Acknowledging Our Kinship -** As we begin today, we acknowledge the history, spirituality, culture, and stewardship of the land of the Indigenous People of this region. We seek to live in respect, peace, and right relations as we live, work, and worship upon Traditional Territory. We are mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

**Candle Lighting -**

The apostle Peter assures us that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We light this candle to remind us that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that even during this time of winter darkness, his light shines out into the world through our work and praise.

**Call To Worship**

One: Jesus embraced his friends with love.
**All: Let us witness to God with our arms.**One: Jesus wept when his friends experienced grief.
**All: Let us witness to God with our hearts.**One: Jesus healed people with his touch.
**All: Let us witness to God with our hands.**One: Jesus taught in the synagogues.
**All: Let us witness to God with our ears.**One: Jesus walked alongside the oppressed.
**All: Let us witness to God with our feet.**One: Jesus taught us that to experience life to its fullest requires our entire selves.
**All: Let us worship God with all of our selves: mind, body, soul, and spirit.**

**Gathering Hymn - The Church is One Foundation - 331 VU**

**Prayer of Confession -**

Loving God, you have asked us to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and to let the oppressed go free. Yet there are times that we have been unable or unwilling to see those among us who didn’t have enough, who felt trapped, and who were treated as “lesser than.” For the times that our own thoughts and actions have caused us or others to stumble, we ask for your forgiveness.

**Words of Assurance**

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.
God’s mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning.
You, each and every one of you, great is your faithfulness, and even greater is God’s forgiveness.
Know that through Christ’s death, even before the dawn breaks new every morning―
we have been forgiven. Amen.

**Young at Heart - Exploring the Epiphany Box**

Put pieces from “Mr./Mrs. Potato Head” toys into the gift box wrapped and decorated with ribbons, bows, and so on. Show the box to the group. Ask them what they like best about it. Ask them what they think is inside such a pretty box. Take out the pieces one by one and ask people to stick them onto the potato figurine. Ask them what the pieces are for. Can you hear with an eye? How do people use body parts in different ways? (*For example, we speak with our mouths, or we can speak with our hands through ASL.*) Ask if any of the parts are better than others. How can they be used in beneficial ways? Even though each part of our body does a different thing, it is still a gift. The lesson is that all parts of the body are useful, and the ones we think are most important may not be the ones that God has put into this congregation/family.

(*Note: Where your faith community includes a person*(*s*) *with physical challenges, please consider whether the above activity is appropriate for your context or whether you might comfortably elaborate on the example of using signing by adding other examples of aids to those who are challenged*.)

**Hymn - Open My Eyes, That I May See - 371 VU**

**WE LISTEN FOR GOD’S WORD**

**Scripture Reading –**

**1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a
Luke 4:14–21**

**Meditation - We, The Anointed Ones**

**Hymn - Hark, The Glad Sound - 29 VU**

**WE RESPOND TO GOD’S WORD**

**Invitation to Offering -**

Just as God has asked us to be the whole body of Christ, we are also asked to use all of our gifts and talents to further the work of God in our world. We have all been blessed with an abundance of gifts: the communities we build, the families we nurture, the friends we love, the church we call home, our abilities and our possessions. We are also asked to share with those around us and, together, to share with those across the world through Mission & Service. We are asked to share our prayers, our love, our finances, and our connections. The body of Christ has many parts and so does the church of Christ. And when we are willing to share the pieces we have, we are able to get closer to the vision of God’s kin-dom here on earth.

**Offering Prayer -** God, we offer these gifts to you knowing that you have called us to work together.
Bless them, multiply them, and use them to enable us, your body, to create a better world with all of creation. Amen.

**Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern -**

Loving Creator, you have called us into relationship with each other.
You have commissioned our lives to be peacemakers
to seek justice, to share your love and grace in the world.

And yet the world builds up walls against us
and becomes an empire where oppression reigns
where violence dictates and compassion seems distant.

Give us the strength needed to build Heaven on Earth
to do your will, not our own to love each other fiercely
to proclaim a new way of life immersed in loving kindness.

Help us to recognize the stranger in our midst
and to open our doors to them.

Help us open our hearts
so we are receptive to your spirit.
Enable us to hear your stirrings in our hearts
and respond without fear or anxiety.
And be with us as we do your work in the world.

You have engraved us on the palms of your hands.
You know every one of our struggles.
You feel our pain and sorrow
and you rejoice when our hearts are joyful,
when our burdens have been released.

Help us to be mindful of our brothers and sisters
in our own communities, as well as in the world,
whose struggles may be different from our own
or similar to ones we have faced:
Those facing deportation
Those in the midst of war
Those who have been offended
Those who seek peace
Those living in poverty
Those suffering loss
Those in pain
Those who are overwhelmed
Those who feel unloved.
And let us give thanks
because you have called us children of God, the body of Christ.

You have offered us unending love.
You have assured us that even in our darkest times
you are there beside us guiding us loving us.
With you we have nothing to fear.

Wrap your loving arms around us
and guide us into new and right relationships.
Let your blessings pour out on our lives
transforming and shaping us into all we can be
and even more than we could ever imagine for ourselves.
We ask for your blessing for those who were unable to be with us today…(*add names*).
May our prayers and your love reach them and everyone in this world.
We ask all this together, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Closing Hymn - I Feel The Winds of God Today - 625 VU**

**Commissioning and Benediction -**

May the perfect love of God,
and the unending grace of Jesus
and the presence of our comforter, the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and with everyone you meet.
Amen.

**Sermon: We, the Anointed Ones**

We can learn a lot about the possession of land and riches from Indigenous communities. Every nation has their own creation story that points to the connection between human life and land. People are woven into creation along with the land and its resources. Indigenous teachings speak in many different ways about how Mother Earth is there to provide us with everything we need. She gives us our clothing, shelter, medicines, food, beauty, water. She sustains us, and we sustain her.

Our creation story in Genesis tells us that God has created an interconnected world in which everything works together for the benefit of everyone, right down to the food we eat. We can see this interconnectedness in Corinthians which tells us that we are all parts of the same body. And we know that the body functions best when it is working together. Each of our bodies has a story to tell: stories of babies and marathons, age and love, work and rest. We use our bodies in different ways. Some of us have parts that work better than others (*You may want to add a personal anecdote. For instance, I would note that “Sometimes, my hip arthritis makes me waddle a little bit like a penguin” to lighten it up.*) Some of us have parts that we use in different ways: some of us use our fingers to read or our hands to speak. Each of our bodies are unique, but none is better than any other. They are different, but not superior.

Unfortunately, this is not how history, or our present day, has always seen bodies. We are supposed to be treating our bodies, and the bodies of others, as part of God’s creation: beautiful, unique, and sacred, something that we should care for with just as much love as we offer the land and the water. Sadly, often our society treats our bodies with the same disregard that is often shown to our land and water resources. Despite the fact that there is more than enough of what we need for everyone, we still live in a world with marked disparity between the rich and the poor. We still live in a world where people have power and other people do not. And we know that this system is failing us. All too often our bodies are seen as nothing more than capital, used to make money for a system that places more value on some people than on others, and where our worth is measured by our ability to be financially productive. But this is not what God commanded of us.

In today’s reading, “the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4: 19) most likely refers to the year of Jubilee which is described in Leviticus 25. Every 50 years, the Israelites are to release their indentured servants. Creditors are to return properties to their rightful owners. Outstanding debts are to be forgiven. The Jubilee ensures that the poor are cared for and that the hoarding of land and wealth is made incredibly difficult. In this passage, God also makes it very clear that “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land” (Leviticus 25: 23–24). God commands us to share our resources, to ensure that there is economic justice, to make sure that inequities are eliminated.

We know as a church that we have not always lived out that commandment. We have not always been welcoming to the stranger in our midst. We have a history that we need to acknowledge: our involvement in residential schools, our silencing of minority voices, the years of pain and trauma that our 2LGBTQI community has gone through. There have been, and continue to be, many times when our church body has not worked together the way it should, or when we have placed a higher value on some parts of the body of Christ than others.

Yet, we are an Easter people. We know that with God there is always a chance for new beginnings and new relationships.

When I think of those new beginnings and relationships, I think of Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM). This ministry began in 1996, when Eileen Antone from Oneida saw a need for places to worship in Toronto that were welcoming to Indigenous people, and where Indigenous cultures and traditions could be incorporated into worship. She approached what was then Toronto Conference, and the Conference agreed to use Mission & Service money to hire a minister for TUNM: Elder Grafton Antone, Eileen’s husband.

Over the years, this little church plant grew, eventually becoming an ecumenical ministry shared with the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. TUNM is a good example of what can happen when the whole body of Christ works together and when resources are shared.

Now, 26 years after TUNM started, it has three staff and reaches more than 90,000 people each year through culturally appropriate street outreach, harm reduction work, prison ministry, hospital chaplaincy, worship, Traditional ceremonies, and reconciliation work. This is just one of many examples of the ways in which our Mission & Service dollars can have a greater impact on our communities than we can imagine.

Today’s reading from Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue in his home community of Nazareth. The writer makes a special point of telling us that Jesus went “as was his custom” (Luke 4: 16). Jesus was not someone who only attended religious services on High Holy Days. He was someone who continued throughout his life to participate in the weekly gatherings of the faithful. We are taught by Jesus’ example that being a part of the life and work of the congregation is integral to how we are to live.

Jesus went into the synagogue and chose a reading from Isaiah that speaks of bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, and letting the oppressed go free. He begins his reading with the same words Isaiah spoke: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” (Luke 4: 18). This is the same Spirit that was given to us during Pentecost, which means that *we* have also been anointed to carry out this task.

We have a choice as individuals and as a church. We can choose to continue in the same way or we can be open to the possibility that God’s Spirit continues to blow through the walls of this church, calling us to live our lives and our faith in the best ways possible: the ways that will allow all parts of the body of Christ to be lifted up and valued. As followers of Jesus, the one who went all the way to the cross to show us the importance of standing in solidarity with the marginalized among us, we live into the promise that God’s Spirit is upon us, calling us to ensure that the year of Jubilee is not a far-off dream, but a daily reality in our bodies, our homes, our communities, and the world. And we also live with the promise that we never do this work alone. Together, as parts of Christ’s body within this community of faith, and as one community of faith among all that make up The United Church of Canada, we are making a difference.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Announcements**

**UPCOMING**

**February 1- Knitting Group**

**February 12-Annual Meeting**

**Don’t forget Annual Meeting is February 12 following church.**