

St. Andrew's United Church (Williams Lake)

March 21, 2021 – Lent 5 Year B

(Zoom, email, regular mail)

ORDER OF SERVICE

Welcome & Land Acknowledgement

Welcome to the gathering of the family of Jesus. We gather on lands walked for thousands of years by people of the First Nations. We acknowledge the history, culture, and spirituality of the Secwépemc (Shuswap) People. We also honour the heritage and gifts of the Métis people. We remember our responsibility as persons who inhabit this land alongside our First Nations and Métis sisters and brothers. May we live the respect that our words offer.

In the name of Jesus, who is alive in each of us, peace to you.

And also with you.

*Invitation to take and release three slow, deep breaths
and allow the space you're in to become worship space for this time*

Written by Susan Lukey. Adapted by Nancy Colton.
Gathering, Lent/Easter 2021, page 29.
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to ground and center ourselves for worship

We Light the Christ Candle

Lent can be a journey, together and alone.

Lent can be temptation for each and every one.

Lent can be a challenge to see with more than eyes.

Lent can be a pathway, through sunset to sunrise.

We light this Christ candle to guide us on our Lenten journey.

(lighting of candle)

Written by Walter Murray.
Gathering, Lent/Easter 2018, page 28.
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Hymn – Spirit, Open My Heart

MV 79

Call to Worship

One: And it begins.

All: Life is a cycle –

One: every moment a beginning,
every moment an ending.

All: Life is a cycle –

One: ever changing, never static.

All: Life is a cycle –

One: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth
and dies, it remains just a single grain.”

All: Life is a cycle –

One: but in all the change,
from birth to death and beyond,
the one constant is this:

**All: In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us. We are not alone.**

Thanks be to God!

Written by Richard Bott.

Gathering, Lent/Easter 2018, page 30.

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Opening Prayer

One: Let us pray:

All: Write your love on our hearts, God of all.

**Place your call into the deepest depths of our souls,
because we are your people, always,
because you are our God, always.**

**Let your Spirit move us,
change us, drop us into the earth,
and then make us grow –
in Jesus’ name! Amen**

Written by Richard Bott.

Gathering, Lent/Easter 2018, page 30.

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Hymn – *In the Bulb there is a Flower*

VU 703

Call to Reconciliation*

We say we want to see Jesus, but too often, we are looking in the wrong places, not listening to the right people, not noticing all the grace around us. As we reflect on our lives, join me, as we come to the One who will forgive us.

Prayer of Confession Unison Prayer for Forgiveness*

You are the Heart which seeks ours, God of the new covenant, yet we turn away from you time and again. We have had so many chances to care for others in these days, yet know we have focused on ourselves too much. We have filled our endless days with the empty calories of fear and worry. We have paid more attention to the ramblings of politicians and celebrities, not your Word of hope.

Now, in these moments, and especially in the silence, come and make us new people. Write the new covenant of grace on our hearts, so we become more forgiving; write mercy, so we might become more compassionate; write hospitality, so we might include all people, just as Jesus welcomes us into the company of people who try to follow him. Amen.

Silence is kept

Assurance of Pardon*

L: A new heart with grace, mercy, hospitality, justice written upon it. That is God's gift to us.

P: A new heart, a new spirit, restored and forgiven, we can go to share this good news with all people. Thanks be to God. Amen.

*Thom Shuman. Liturgy w/communion for Lent 5 - B in a time of pandemic (March 21, 2021). Accessed March 19, 2021. Used with permission.

Scripture Readings

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“I will write my law on their hearts”

John 12:20-33

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth

(as told by Linnea Good)

Sermon – The Days are Surely Coming

I wonder if there are any days, any days of celebration, any days of joy, that are written on your hearts? In these days, or in past days? Celebrations in the moment or in memory? Days connected, or not even connected, anymore, to their stories, or their histories?

Like St. Patrick's Day, maybe? Or Mardi Gras?

A couple of years ago, Kiera and her friend from Victoria who she met in St Jean, Quebec, back when they were on basic training together, went to New Orleans. With my mom at on I was really glad they decided intentionally – that really pleased me – to go a week or two AFTER Mardi Gras. They wanted to celebrate Mardi Gras, or the spirit of it, anyway, in New Orleans. They wanted to be part of the joy. I suppose there were ways in which they wanted to have the joy of Mardi Gras written on their hearts, in their minds, in their memories. And they did.

Kiera added a tattoo, or two, but that's a story for another day, possibly best not shared in a sermon.

They wanted the connection in their hearts; they wanted to experience and connect the joy at the level of the heart. They wanted to be invested in the joy.

The pandemic has shut down lots of things over the past year, churches are just a part of that. And it's not only about services, of course, it's the events, dinners, small groups, healing pathways, catering, hospitality after worship, visiting. All of that. Yes, being "the church" isn't about a place, or a building, and we are discovering new ways of being connected. Still, the losses are real, and we've missed doing so many of the things we used to do regularly as a community. The things we enjoyed doing together – in church and in our day to day lives. We miss the connection with each other.

Recently a friend of mine was telling me that someone had told him how much they were missing in-person bible study and how he replied saying as soon as they're able to get together again, they should have a bible study on the book of Job. After all, think of all the stuff Job went through. Who suffered more than Job? Then he thought about it, he said, and decided he was mistaken. We need to look at Jerimiah.

Not Jeremiah the bull frog who was a very good friend to all, as the Three Dog Night song goes. That's the other Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was a prophet through some pretty difficult times for the Hebrew people, including the defeat and conquest of their nation, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the exile of the people to Babylon. There was a lot of grief, brokenness, hurt, and suffering. It was a time that people moved away from God, even to the point that Jeremiah says they've broken their covenant with God. Jeremiah is full of gloom, sadness, and despair, enough to earn him the nickname "the weeping prophet" for the grief he and his people shared. A lot of lament.

Yet that's not the whole story.

Jeremiah turns to hope. In fact, there's a whole section in his book called "the book of consolation" in which he offers amazing words of hope. In fact, Jeremiah says that God offers a new covenant, one that will be written on the heart of each person. "The days are surely coming," says God, when I'll make a new covenant that will be different from the ones that have been broken or forgotten, that were written on stone, or in a rainbow, or a bronze serpent on a stick. Instead of being a covenant that builds on behaviour, it'll begin where we all begin: in the heart. And through it, the people will know God.

It will create community and relationship from the inside out. Love is at the heart of this covenant. What has always been in our hearts will be the basis of our relationship with God and with each other.

Know. God.

By whatever name you call God, knowing is more than knowledge or understanding, it's an awareness of what God is and finding that "is" in ourselves, in our own heart, mind and soul, with every fibre of our being. That means we begin with love and we live in love and we live out love in all things.

Christians interpret Jeremiah's prophesy as being fulfilled in Jesus, the one who shows us how to live the love that is in each of us. That's why it's so important to understand Jesus as one of us, not set apart, so that we can see that we are one with Jesus and each other and creation. We are unique and individual, but our hearts, like Jesus, hold all the divinity and humanity that is love and grace. It's written there – on our hearts – for us to share.

The days are surely coming. They're not here yet, but the days are surely coming.

We've seen glimpses of that through the pandemic over the last year. We've seen that as we've understood anew what is important, who and what essential is, what essential even means; in the ways we've reached out to help neighbours, shown kindness, compassion, and grace. Offered hope and shared joy.

All of that is within us – the love and the grace and the compassion. Everything we need to live lives of love is within us, all of God and the earth is within us. We have everything we need. It's the love that's at the heart of the covenant – it's written on our hearts. Right where God wrote it, Jeremiah reminds us.

And surely the days are coming when this will be over and we can move on to living out some of the things we've learned.

“The days are surely coming,” says God. They are. Hope says that's a certainty. Jesus framed it as “heaven is near.” Perhaps the days are still to come, though we do see glimpses every day, of what it means to live love. But perhaps we're still learning. Jesus, and others, have pointed out that we're created of God and of the earth. The same divinity which is Jesus is in you already. Has been since the beginning.

What we need to work on in our awareness of it. That, and our willingness to live it, is our part of the new covenant. It's us to us to do our part. Surely, we have it in us.

Amen.

Hymn – *Now the Green Blade Rises*

VU 186

Community Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

We give thanks for the gifts we receive, including the financial gifts we receive.
For the love of the world,
Jesus offered everything he had, even life itself.
In response to this powerful gift of love,
we offer our gifts and our lives to God
as we share our offering...

Written by Frances Flook. Adapted by Nancy Colton.
Gathering, Lent/Easter/Pentecost 2021 page 37.
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... asking that God, our Loving Provider,
bless and grow these gifts to God's will and purposes.

Written by Jani Francis. Adapted by Nancy Colton.
Gathering, Lent/Easter/Pentecost 2021 page 37.
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... the prayer shared was based on a prayer from Voiced United...

And now, O God, we are one in prayer but bring our own thanks and concerns. If some need to say "help me", or "save me", or "hold me", or "forgive me", then let these be spoken now in the confidence of our hearts in a moment of quiet prayer.

God in Community, Holy in One,
hear us as we pray as we have been taught,

The Lord's Prayer

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 those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
forever and ever. **Amen.**

Minute for Mission

Turning Hard Work into Hope Every Day: Margaret's Story

The Life and Work of our Congregation

- **Book Study** – the Board invites you to join them in reading and studying *Thriving Churches: Urban and Rural Successes*. (Lorraine MacKenzie Shepherd. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2021.) The plan is to read the whole book through and then

meet two twice for 90 minutes to discuss aspects of the book. (The group could decide to meet three times if it wanted to.) Books will be ordered from the United Church Resource Distribution Centre (UCRD) and available from the office when they arrive. Of important note, this is a Canadian book written by an United Church Minister with contributions from other UCC ministers all looking at United Churches across the country. Please let Nancy know if you'd like to participate in this book study. When the books arrive, we'll decide on the timeline and when we'll host discussions/conversations.

Hymn – *We are Pilgrims*

VU 595

Commissioning & Benediction

“The world is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love.”
(William Sloan Coffin)

“Life is short. We don't have much time to gladden the hearts of those who walk [the Way] with us. So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind.” (Henri-Frédéric Amiel)

Written by Gord Dunbar.
Gathering, Lent/Easter 2018, page 34.
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With the imprint of God's covenant upon you,
 you are sent out in the name of God.
Forgiven, loved, freed;
 go in peace to serve with all God
 has given you.

Written by Elaine Bidgood Sweet.
Gathering, Lent/Easter 2015, page 36.
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