

Week 4: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Liturgy

Greeting

One: God is good
All: **all the time.**
One: All the time
All: **God is good.**

Settler Acknowledgement of Our Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Long before my people journeyed to this land, Indigenous people were here (*you may include names of local Indigenous peoples and/or treaties*), and they received from their Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. When they shared their vision, my people did not hear. My people tried to force Indigenous peoples to be like us, and, in so doing, we helped to destroy the vision that made them what they were.

We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that our church did not or would not hear and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.

We pray that all Indigenous people will hear the sincerity of our words today and that they will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future.

Lighting of the Christ Candle and/or Rainbow Candle

(You could also simply light the candle(s) and then proceed with singing and the call to worship.)

One: God is here
All: **all the time.**
One: All the time
All: **God is here.**
One: All are welcome
All: **all the time.**
One: All the time
All: **All are welcome.**

Call to Worship (Jeremiah 4:1–10)

("Listen, God Is Calling" (MV 97) could be used as a centering song before and after.)

**Listen, God is calling, through the Word inviting,
Offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy! (Listen)**

One: Listen—Do you hear the voice of the Holy One?

All: **Inviting, daring, challenging, celebrating, creating—you and me.**

One: I form you.

All: **I know you.**

One: I consecrate you.

All: **I appoint you.**

One: I send you.

All: **Fear no one. I am with you.**

One: I will deliver you.

All: **I have put my words in your mouth.**

One: God, may we have ears to hear and voices to speak this truth.

All: **Let us worship.**

Opening Prayer

(Written by the Worship Team of the Inaugural Meetings of Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council and Region 15 Regional Council, May 2019. Used with Permission.)

(facing east)

One: From the east, the direction of the rising sun,
we receive peace and light and wisdom and knowledge.

All: **We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(facing south)

One: From the south comes warmth, guidance,
and the beginning and the end of life.

All: **We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(facing west)

One: From the west comes the rain,
purifying waters, to sustain all living things.

All: **We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(facing north)

One: From the north comes the cold and mighty wind,
the white snows, giving us strength and endurance.

All: **We are grateful for these gifts, O God.**

(facing upward)

One: From the heavens we receive darkness and light,
the air of your breath,

and messages from your winged creatures.

All: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

(facing downward)

One: From the earth we come and to the earth we will return.

All: We are grateful for your creation, Mother Earth, O God.

One: May we walk good paths, O God,
 living on this earth as one creation should,
 rejoicing in one another's blessing,
 sympathizing in one another's sorrows,
 rooting up injustice,
 planting the seeds of peace,
 and together with you, renewing the face of the earth. Amen.

Hymn

"Dance with the Spirit" (MV 156)

"Creator God You Gave Us Life" (MV 27)

"Deep in Our Hearts" (MV 154)

"Will You Come and See the Light" (VU 96)

"The Church Is Wherever God's People" (VU 579)

Prayer of Confession

Let us pray:

One: Created.

All: Consecrated. Appointed. Sent. Confident. Faithful.

One: Great Spirit, you invite us to accept the richness and abundance in which every human being is delightfully made.

All: Forgive us when we limit the grace and wonder of which we are capable.

One: Forgive us when we put limits on your power in us, such as when we say, "But I am only...only one person...only so talented...only so much."

All: We are not *only* any single thing. We are yours.

One: And the Spirit that thrums within each of us is blessed, beautiful, and capable of creating new and abundant life. That is your truth.

All: May our words and our actions as the church of Christ testify that it is also ours.

(Silence or contemplative music could be offered.)

Assurance of Grace

The Spirit calls and commissions us to be the body of the Risen Christ. Every single inch of who we are is enveloped in that call to create: to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and overthrow those systems and ways of living that diminish the image of neighbourly love. Together with all

our relations, may the gift of our lives build and plant a kin-dom almost and already on its way. Rest assured, we are made for this. We are forgiven that, in turn, we may also forgive through the eternal power of Life. In Jesus' name, so be it. Amen.

Exploring the Epiphany Box

(Purchase or borrow 3-D glasses and pictures.)

Put a 3-D picture in your decorated box. Ask the congregation what they think is in the box this week. Take out the picture and show everyone. "What do you see?" Accept all answers. "I can't quite make out what this picture really is—can you? What are we missing?" Chances are that someone will identify it's 3-D and that you will need 3-D glasses. "Right! It is a 3-D picture and in order to see all the angles of what this is, we need to see differently. We need a different kind of sight—we need 3-D glasses!" Whip out your glasses and exclaim, "Ah-ha!" Let the congregation take turns looking at the picture with 3-D glasses, but don't let anyone say what it is. Keep it a secret until you're ready to ask everyone to share their answer at the same time.

Continue with: "Sometimes, this is us. We look at one another and we think we see clearly: They are just a child. They are just a senior. They are just rich. They are just poor. They are just disabled, and so on. The Bible tells us that the prophet Jeremiah saw himself that way. God asked him to change the world, and all he could think about was how mixed up he was to be trusted with something so important. Jeremiah only saw how small he was as a child for something that seemed so big. Surely God meant to ask someone else!

"But God doesn't see us that way. God sees every dimension in which we are powerfully and beautifully made. God calls everyone in the world and asks, 'Do you see what I see? Because I see someone who has the gift to change the world. Will you share the gift of your life, your voice, your presence, your talents, your treasure, so that love and justice can be seen by everyone?'"

Then ask: "Do you know any child in particular who showed us how to see God's gift in others in that way?" *(The obvious answer might be Jesus, but welcome all answers—there can be some powerful stories here.)*

Conclude with: "If we accept God's invitation to see ourselves with love and compassion, then guess what? Our faith helps us see the potential in everyone to join in. All they're waiting for is someone who will see them clearly and who invites them to be a part of something we call church. This week, practise looking at the people around you and naming the gifts that God has given them. Tell them what you see and invite them to share their gift!"

Hymn

"Small Things Count" (VU 361)

"I Can Feel You Near Me God (Jump for Joy)" (MV 48)

Scripture

(Feel free to read Jeremiah 4:1–10 only, unless your congregation regularly reads all the lectionary readings for the Sunday.)

Jeremiah 4:1–10

Psalm 71:1–6

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Luke 4:21–30

Ministry of Music

Sermon

Here! Now! Are You Ready?

Hymn

“Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154)

“Open My Eyes, that I May See” (VU 371)

“Seek Ye First the Kingdom” (VU 356)

Offering Invitation

Practise what you preached with the kids. If you're a small congregation, ask people within the church to look at another person and name a gift they see. Then have the congregation affirm that we are blessed when a person shares that gift. If you're a larger congregation, you may want to have your staff or a key volunteer take the lead on this.

For example, the minister might say: “Kelly, in you I see God's gift of wisdom.” Then invite everyone to respond, “It's an honour to know you, Kelly!” Then Kelly would take a turn, or the minister could continue naming the gifts of other people in the congregation.

If you have newcomers in your community, you may choose to ask them their name and what brought them to worship that day. Use that response as the gift and affirm in the same way as above.

For example, the minister might say: “Jim, I see your presence as God's gift for us today.” Then invite everyone to respond “It's an honour to know you, Jim.”

At the end, close with this invitation:

“We are invited by the Giver of every good gift to share all that is within us. Everyone who is here is a gift. Everyone who is yet to arrive is a gift. Everyone who we are yet to meet is a gift. For the rich and varied ways we will respond and share the gifts within us, we give thanks. Our offering will now be received. Now is the opportunity to share your gifts to further the church's work and the Spirit's mission.”

Offertory

"Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands" (VU 537)

"What Can I Do?" (MV 191)

Prayer of Dedication

May what we have offered here be true, be blessed, and be sent into our world by the Spirit of the One who, even now, is with us. Always. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People

Creator, you planted us in the great cosmic eruption of life.

You invite us into relationship,

into a boundless love that sees the truth of who we are:

Created. Consecrated. Appointed. Sent. Confident. Faithful.

Yours.

As your people, imperfect as we are and perfectly capable as you affirm,
you invite us into your mission of love and reconciliation.

You call us to build on what you have planted.

(Name the ways your church is living out your local mission, or the church's national mission, and give thanks and praise to the Maker.)

Reconciling and Reviving God, you invite us into the wounded places

where what we see is distorted and obscured

by our bias, our judgments, our hard-heartedness.

You give us courage and the assurance that into this valley we must go:

for there, you give us the possibility of vulnerably

facing all that keeps us from your Kin-dom come.

You call us to uproot and tear down.

(Name the wounded places you see in your community, our country, and our world where we are reluctant to engage and yet are surely called not to turn away, but to lean into with our faith.)

Resurrecting and Living God, you invite us to transform and be transformed

so that we align our sight with your Kin-dom vision,

so that we see that death cannot exist apart from life.

Death is always a part of life,

and wherever this life may take us, we are not alone.

You are with us,

created and creating God,

you who tears down, only to build,

you who plucks up, only to plant.

In the breath of the Spirit that fills our lungs,

in the strong name of Christ who urges us onward with Love and Justice

in response to your invitation, we offer all that we have, all that we are,
in the service of Community and Creation.

We pray in the name of the one who said that
you are like a mother who gathers her chicks beneath the shadow of her wing
and that you are also like...Our Father... (*Prayer of Jesus*). Amen.

Hymn

"God of the Bible" (MV 28)

"Let Us Build a House" (MV 1)

"Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" (VU 375)

Commissioning

Here is the place.

Now is the time.

God calls.

We answer.

Let us go and answer as church,

as people sent to root up injustice

and to plant the seeds of peace,

that together with the Spirit, we would renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Benediction

One: Bless the Giver

All: and every good gift!

One: Bless all that has been planted,

All: that it will sprout in us and in others.

One: Bless the harvest of life

All: that we are called to share.

One: In our words, in our actions, in our time, talents, and treasure

All: may the Spirit in me honour the Spirit in you.

Amen.

Sending

"Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New" (MV 115)

Sermon: Here! Now! Are You Ready?

Created. Consecrated. Appointed. Sent. Confident. Faithful.

These are the words God ascribes to Jeremiah as a child—words that stretch back to before Jeremiah was born, if you take the scripture literally.

Jeremiah earned the tag “the weeping prophet” for all the struggles he endured. God called him to speak truth to power. What’s God calling you to do this morning?

What about our congregation? Did you hear that? I think I heard God is calling us. Here. Now.

Are you ready?

Jeremiah warned Israel that their kingdom would fall to the Babylonians because the Israelites insisted on breaking right relationship with God’s peace and justice. They didn’t want to do the work of the kin-dom anymore, because it was easier to invest in systems of idolatry, greed, and false prophets, maintaining the status quo at any cost.

So, Jeremiah was called to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. In our United Church language, we would say that he was called to live a faith whose actions profess that “in life, in death, in life beyond death—God is with us.”

Jeremiah was scorned, shunned, and finally thrown into a well to starve to death, so that King Zedekiah’s officials could claim they had no blood on their hands.

Jeremiah is the stuff of biblical legend, so of course those words apply to him and his faith in his time, when there was great instability and conflict. We get it. God called Jeremiah.

But what does that have to do with us? Are you called by God? Am I? Is this church called by God? Are you a prophet, a leader, a revolutionary?

Like Jeremiah, would you say that God called you before you were even formed?

We’re teachers, parents, grandparents, retirees, engineers, lawyers, plumbers, and fisher folks (*describe the occupations of your community of faith*). We’re not called to face off against kings in God’s name, are we? Let’s have a show of hands. Who’s going to follow in Jeremiah’s footsteps and be first down the well?

So, what about us? Is God inviting, daring, challenging, celebrating, creating you and me?

Anthropologist, practitioner, and storyteller Marlon Hall once said yes! (Pretty much.)

He said, “Worship is when you do what you were born to do and what you’re doing makes an indelible mark on humanity that no one can erase because no one can make it but you. Worship is when, because of the art that you do...because of the architecture that you do, you do it so

divinely artfully that human flourishing comes about and humanity is not the same because of your everyday life.... Worship is vocation; it's *vocare* [in Latin]. It's when you sing the same song on Tuesday at your board meeting" that you did on Sunday in your worship."¹

How are you doing your work? Because God is saying the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few (Matthew 9:37), God's calling you to roll up your sleeves. Will you? Will we answer the call together?

God is calling you, just as Jeremiah was called. Here. Now. In and through your work: your teaching, your babysitting, your parenting, your knitting, your fishing, your painting, your plumbing, your retiring. Whatever you do, God is calling you to work for a new kin-dom's birth. Are you ready to deliver?

Jeremiah's faith reminds us that church is not just a noun, it's also a verb—a way of seeing and experiencing the journey of life and inviting others to do the same. It's not a destination or an end. It's an orientation for how to begin living again—living in a way that is profoundly shaped by the Spirit of love and justice that's turning over tables and building bridges between all of us.

Jeremiah was a prophet in the time of King Zedekiah. That was his calling. That was his work. What's yours? What's mine? What's our God-given work together?

Created. Consecrated. Appointed. Sent. Confident. Faithful. These are not just Jeremiah's words. These are God's words for you and me.

God is inviting, daring, challenging, celebrating, creating you and me as people of faith—as communities of faith.

Listen! God is calling us. Here. Now. Are you ready?

Pluck up. Pull down. Throw out, overthrow. Build. And plant.

What happens when we commit those words to flesh, to the way we see one another and the choices we make for the sake of this world as disciples of Jesus?

Some everyday people in St. John's United Church in Fall River, Nova Scotia, did exactly that. With the eyes of the church, they looked around at their community. What would be their work? How was God inviting them to serve?

They could see youth struggling with couch surfing, addictions, peer pressure, bullying, and the lack of a safe place to simply be themselves.

¹ Marlon Hall quoted in the video *Worship Is Life*, theworkofthepeople.com/worship-is-life. Reprinted with permission of The Work of the People: Films for Discovery & Transformation.

They decided to pluck up and pull down some of those very issues. To throw out and overthrow those plagues on our youth. To build and to plant something new. God was calling. Here. Now. And they were willing to open their hearts and minds to listen.

What became the “KD Lunch Ministry” would be their God-given work.

Every Thursday, volunteer teams from the congregation would set out a grand central table in their hall. This was the grandest of communion tables. They would fill it with fresh bread, salads, fruit, and of course, homemade sweets from the kitchens of the congregation. They also supplied all-you-could-eat Kraft Dinner. The lunch was free, and all were truly welcome.

They boldly invited students from the nearby high school to come and eat and drink without price. (Isaiah 55:1)

At first, only a few students responded. Eventually, hundreds came, so many that, to the congregation’s delight, the students filled the hall and some had to eat KD in the pews.

Students asked, “What is this place, anyway?”

When told it was a church, many were surprised. They’d never been inside one.

When asked, “What’s the catch? What do you want from me? Why are you doing this?” Volunteers would respond: “There is none. We want you to know you are loved, you are seen, you matter. We do it because we choose to.”

A group of students arrived early one day, forlorn. Their friend had just been in a car accident that morning. Distraught, they called a volunteer to join their conversation. They asked if it was okay for them to pray for their friend. The volunteer responded: “Of course!” One youth spoke up with the question on everyone’s heart, “But we don’t know how. Can you show us?”

“I can try,” said the volunteer. “What was your friend’s name? Tell me about them, and how you’re feeling. Then, let’s pray.”

Over the years, graduating students made banners, writing messages of thanksgiving to the congregation. One read, “Without Thursdays, I don’t know if I would have made it though this year. Thank you.”

Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, listen to what I’m telling you:

This is the call. This is the work.

Today, our ancestor of faith, Jeremiah, calls us. Jesus Christ, calls us. The Holy Spirit calls us.

God is calling us to transform our everyday work, our skills, and our talents that we all take for granted by turning them into ploughshares and pruning hooks for the kin-dom that is already almost here.

Listen, God is calling. Here. Now.

Are you ready?

God is inviting, daring, challenging, celebrating, creating you and me as people of faith, as a community of faith.

You are created. Consecrated. Appointed. Sent. Confident. Faithful.

God says, "You are gifted, called, and chosen. You are mine."

Siblings in Christ, Good News: you are the church!

United in how we give and share who we are and what we have, let's give the Spirit our answer.

Over the last [*number of*] weeks, you've been asked to consider making a financial commitment to the ministry we share together. This is the place. Now is the time. God is calling. Are you ready? I invite you to make that commitment by filling out your PAR form online or in person today. (*Offer all the ways for financial giving that you would like to offer the congregation.*)

If you believe in the love and justice work of our church, both at home and around the world through Mission & Service, ministries like (*name examples that resonate with your church*), then right here, right now, united, let's *give* our answer.

If you believe in the mission and ministry we share together as people committed to loving and serving God's people through ministries like (*name local examples about your ministry that inspire and are meaningful to your church*), then right here, right now, united, let's *give* our answer.

May our actions declare our birthright, as a city on a hill, as a lamp whose sole purpose is to never be hidden, but to shine the affirming love and justice of God for the sake of all.

And all the people said: Amen.