

Worship at Home and ZOOM Worship for December 6 2020,
Second Sunday of Advent

Our Worship at Home this week mirrors our ZOOM worship service. The prayers and reflection here – including communion – are the same as those we will be using together.

***Please make sure your microphones are muted during the service.
If you have called in on your phone, press *6 to mute yourself.***

Words printed in Italics would traditionally be spoken by the entire congregation. If your microphone is muted please feel free to speak those words along with our readers, and of course sing along with the hymns!

To participate in the ZOOM worship over your telephone, call 647-374-4685 or 647-558-0588, and when asked enter this meeting id: **883 1808 7511** and this pass code: **052525**. You will hear the service and even be able to speak when it is appropriate.

If you would like to participate in communion, make sure you have some bread or a cracker and some juice handy!

Rev. Joanne

Centering Music: "Peace Shines as a Solitary Star" MV 220

Peace Shines as a solitary star,
faith is the inner light.
You and I together mirror the Light of Lights,
and illumine the pathway home.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: In the midst of darkness,
Two: the light of God draws us together across time and space.
One: In this Advent where everything seems different,
Two: the light of God draws us together across time and space.
One: As we prepare our hearts and our homes to welcome the Holy One,
Two: the light of God draws us together across time and space.
One: We each have our own road to Bethlehem this year, God.
Guide us, as we follow our sometimes solitary paths,
into expressions of hope and peace that shine
into our own lives, and into the lives of others.
Help us, as we travel at a distance from one another,
to feel the connectedness of your peace.
Lead us, God, to turn rough places into comforting ones,
to make a level playing field for all your people,
so that your love and justice can be known to all. Amen

Opening Music: "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" VU 8

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung,
of Jesse's lineage coming, as seers of old have sung.
It came a blossom bright, amid the cold of winter,
when half-spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind,
with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright she bore for us a Savior
when half-spent was the night.

Prayer of Remembrance

God of hope and love,

Today, on this National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women, we stand somewhere between peace and joy, unsure where to find them in a world where women continue to be subject to violence because they are women.

Great and Holy Mystery, Comforter, Advocate,

We turn to you on this anniversary of the Montreal massacre where a man who declared feminists his enemy opened fire in a school, killing fourteen, wounding fourteen.

We pray for the beautiful Indigenous girls whose lives were cruelly shortened, for the beautiful Indigenous women who were robbed of their potential, for the beautiful two-spirited people who were targeted because of bigotry.

Be with all who are picking up, with tears, the pieces of their lives, painstakingly living to see another day, and another, and another, becoming survivors.

Be with them in the fear that haunts them daily and pursues them in their dreams.

Be with them in their anger, which fuels their drive for justice, and their certainty that this must not happen again.

And yet it happens to another, and another, and another.

We pray that women's voices may be heard and taken into account in all peace and reconciliation work.

We pray for right and just relations between women and men, that together we may transform and overcome violence in all its forms and learn to celebrate our diversity and interdependence. We look forward to the age of peace, when violence is banished, both women and men are able to love and to be loved, and the work and wealth of our world is justly shared.

Today it is hard for us to imagine the lamb and the lion together to know that our hearts will rejoice at the arrival of justice.

And yet we persevere.

We remember, and we persevere. Amen.

*Adapted from resources provided by The United Church of Canada,
Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada and the World Council of Churches*

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the
Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for
our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the
field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for
ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'
See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Reflection: *included at the end of the service for those worshipping at home*

Hymn: "Bread of Life, Feed My Soul" MV 193

Bread of life, feed my soul, as the presence of the Spirit makes me whole.

Bread of life, fill my heart, with the grace and mercy you impart.

I have heard your voice calling, "Come my friend and share
in the feast that is laid out for you to show how much I care."

Bread of life, help me live, a life as pure and true as Jesus did.

Bread of life, help me see the boundless love of Christ for you and me.

I have heard your voice calling, "Come my friend and share
in the feast that is laid out for you to show how much I care."

Bread of life, feed my soul, as the presence of the Spirit makes me whole.

Bread of life, fill my heart, with the grace and mercy you impart.

Sacrament of Communion

One: The Holy One is here with each of us.

Two: *God's Spirit is with us wherever we are today.*

One: Lift up your hearts.

Two: *As God's people we lift them to the Lord.*

One: Let us give thanks to God.

Two: *It is right for us to offer thanks and praise.*

One: In the rich dark of winter, God makes an astounding promise:
"I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up." (Jeremiah 33:15)

Two: In the wilderness, a voice cries out, longing for
the Refiner's fire, repair, and renewal,
the promised birth (and rebirth) of hope.

One: Called to bear the weight and fruit of promise,
Mary sings ancient trust—the song of generations—
that God comes to fill the hungry and lift the humble.
She sings that love and truth will meet,
that justice and peace will kiss.

Two: In the midst of uncertainty, Jesus assures his disciples:
Just as the tree blooms, so the signs are clear
that the kingdom of God is near.
In the deep of our own winter, we look for them:
bud of hope, branch of peace, sprig of joy, blossom of love.

One: While around us the snares of fear and conflict
lie in wait of infant hope,
you, O Wisdom, O Endless Love, O Radiant Dawn, are there,
keeping vigil with us, in this season of expectation.

Two: We gather around our own tables,
praying that crooked ways be made straight,
that valley's peace be lifted up and mountain's might brought low
so that all God's people might rejoice together:

*O Holy, holy God of power and might,
We sing with all creation of your Light.
Blest is the One who comes in your name,
Hosanna we declare through time and space.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel will come to us as prophets do foretell.*

One: We give thanks for the mystery and wonder revealed that first night, as humble people
led by hope gathered in a quiet stable and were witness to your promise reborn. We give
thanks for the blessing and love Jesus shared with all whom he met, in food and story.

Two: We remember that, on the night before he was handed over to die, Jesus broke bread
with his friends, blessed it, gave thanks, and said, "Take, eat. This is my body, which I
give for you. When you share it, remember me."

One: We remember that he took the cup and, giving thanks, said, "This cup is the new
covenant in my blood. When you drink it, remember me." Revealed in stable, cross, and
empty tomb, we give thanks, O God, for your limitless love for all. With your people of all
times and places, we await with hope the fulfillment of your vision for all creation.

Bless us, O God, and these your gifts, found in our own homes, made holy by your love
and your Spirit. Encourage us to share your life and love, which make us, and the gifts
we share, truly holy.

Two: Transform us, God, and your world, and bless your children:
those who feel alone or afraid...
those whose souls and homes are broken by violence...
those who will go hungry, thirsty, and cold tonight...
those who long only to hear that they are loved...
God made known in Jesus Christ, hear our prayer.
We join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us,
singing into our own spaces and trusting that the Spirit carries
our prayers

The Lord's Prayer VU 959

We pray these things, trusting in God's faithfulness revealed:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

One: Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory is yours, God most holy,
now and forever.
Amen

Breaking the Bread and Pouring the Cup

*This would be the moment for you to take your own bread and juice, perhaps sharing the words
"Jesus Christ the bread of life" and "Jesus Christ the true vine." If you are with another person,
you might choose to serve the bread and juice to each other.*

Prayer after Communion

One: At this table, Christ is the host, welcoming all who hunger.
At our tables, may Christ be our guest this day and always, that we might welcome
hope, peace, joy, and love into our lives, and become hosts to God's presence and
people.

Two: God of Love, guide us to the stables of our world, where the lonely and longing gather.
Lead us to the mangers of our time, where hope and renewal are born again. Make us
heralds of your love and joy. Amen.

Closing Music: "There's A Voice in the Wilderness Crying" VU 18

There's a voice in the wilderness crying, a call from the ways untrod:
prepare in the desert a highway, a highway for our God!
The valleys shall be exalted, the lofty hills brought low;
make straight all the crooked places where the Lord our God may go!

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up to the heights and sing!
Proclaim to a desolate people the coming of their King.
Like the flowers of the field they perish, like grass our works decay,
the power and pomp of nations shall pass like a dream away,

But the word of our God endureth; whose arm is ever strong;
God stands in the midst of nations, and soon will right the wrong.
God shall feed the flock like a shepherd, the lambs will gently hold,
to pastures of peace will lead them, and bring them safe to the fold.

There's a voice in the wilderness crying,
a call from the ways untrod:
prepare in the desert a highway,
a highway for our God!
The valleys shall be exalted,
the lofty hills brought low;
make straight all the crooked places
where the Lord our God may go!

Blessing

For those who wish to remain to visit, you will be invited to turn on your microphones and stay on the ZOOM call.

*Our communion liturgy was written by Rev. Andrew O'Neil,
St. Paul's United Church, Riverview, NB and adapted for our ZOOM Worship and Worship at Home. © 2018 The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include this notice.*

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

Our scripture readings for today take us back to beginnings – the beginning of the post-Babylonian exile time for the Israelite people, the beginning of Jesus' story as told in Mark's gospel. They both speak of preparing for God's coming, and of voices from the wilderness, and change. Beginnings can be both exciting and frightening, filled with the unknown and yet also filled with promise. For the writer of the Isaiah verses, a new time has come, the people can return to their land, but not without a new way of thinking about and being in relationship with God. In the verses from Mark, we are reminded of Isaiah's words of change, but are given a name and a description of that one who "cries out in the wilderness" and who heralds the change that brings us into relationship with God through Jesus Christ that we call John the Baptist.

Mark does not begin his story with a baby, with angel visitations to anxious parent-to-be or shepherds in fields. Mark begins in the wilderness – a place that was not meant for human habitation, a place of wildness and uncertainty, a place that needed transformation or to be 'prepared' in order for "the glory of the Lord" to be revealed. A place where a voice could be heard.

Let's think back for a moment – to the beginning of the global pandemic, to the beginning of lockdowns and restrictions, and the cessation of worshipping together. I think we've learned a thing or two about wilderness times over the past nine months. The landscape of our lives

shifted, and places that had been safe and nourishing – like our churches and other places of worship - became potentially unsafe. A simple trip to the grocery store became an excursion into unfamiliar territory with masks and sometimes gloves and hand sanitizer and suspicious looks at anyone who happened to cough or sneeze. Some of us stopped going out at all. We have certainly heard voices crying out - some in warning, some in despair, some encouraging. We have had to learn to be together differently, like through this ZOOM worship time. We have changed our routines, changed our connections, and changed our lives. I wonder if this can also change our relationship with God, as it did for the people of Isaiah's time, or Mark's time? Can the wilderness of pandemic change our own preparations for God's Light and Love to be born into the world?

Perhaps the clearer or 'straight' path has come to us because we are simplifying our celebrations this year, and perhaps that can lead us to spend a bit more time thinking about Christmas in different ways. Perhaps we will have more time to reach out by telephone or email. Perhaps we will take more time to read Christmas cards and messages – or send some of our own, sharing God's care and compassion. Perhaps we could free up some of our otherwise bustling pre-Christmas time to sit quietly with God, and to marvel at love born into the world.

Faith leaders in our Mississauga United Churches have noticed that people beyond their regular worshipping communities are tuning in to services, or podcasts, or other material offered on line – including Applewood. I have received calls from individuals outside our faith family wanting to talk about their faith and God, or emails from folk who would like to start receiving the links to our worship materials. I believe that many of these people are experiencing a shift in the way they think about and relate to God and their own faith journey, and it is a hopeful sign that rough places are being made smoother.

Finally, we remember the very first word of our readings today – “Comfort.” In the midst of wilderness times, when change surrounds us, when voices cry out, our God speaks that word to us. Comfort through our scripture stories in the gospels and prophetic poetry like Isaiah. Comfort through the new ways we are finding to gather and care for one another. Comfort in the knowledge that the Spirit of God is ever moving, ever present, ever nurturing. Comfort in our preparations of mind, heart and home to welcome God-with-us, in a tiny child bringing hope, peace and love to us all.

Thanks be to God.