

**Zoom Worship for February 13, 2022
6th Sunday after Epiphany**

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 Mississaugas 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: "If You Will Trust in God to Guide You" VU 286 verse 1

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.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: When we are weary in body mind or spirit, God calls us blessed.
Two: *When we offer care and support to others, God calls us a blessing.*
One: When we are hurting, God calls us blessed.
Two: *When we offer healing, God calls us a blessing.*
One: When we are discouraged and afraid, God calls us blessed.
Two: *When we reach out with hope and courage, God calls us a blessing.*
One: When we gather for worship over screens and phones, we are blessed.
Two: *When we share our worship in whatever way we can, we are a blessing.*
One: When we pray, we open ourselves to all the blessings God offers:

**All: God of mystery and promise,
we have come together with hope and trust,
praying to know your presence in our lives and our community.
You who love the poor, you who love the outcast,
help us to share your justice and equity
even when we feel discouraged and tired.
Lead us to know your truth, seek your peace,
and be filled with your Spirit.
Amen**

Opening Hymn: "Joyful, Joyful" VU 232

Joyful, joyful we adore you,
God of glory, life and love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you,
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the gloom of doubt away;

giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day.

All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heaven reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
centre of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain,
sound their praise eternally.

You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
wellspring of the joy of living,
ocean depth of happy rest!
Source of grace and fount of blessing,
let your light upon us shine;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals join the mighty chorus
which the morning stars began;
God's own love is reigning o'er us,
joining people hand in hand.
Ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife;
joyful music leads us sunward
in the triumph song of life.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation “A Prayer for Black History Month” by Alydia Smith

God of peace,
give us the courage, strength and perseverance needed,
to challenge the systems of racism,
so that we can clear a path for your justice, peace, and equity.
We believe racism is present
in our society and in our church,
and throughout time has manifested itself in many forms and in varying degrees.
We know racism is alive
in our language and in our structures,
and through our systems it actively works to deconstruct your glorious design,
blocking the path to justice, equity, and peace that Jesus brings.
Racism exists, and it challenges the gospel message that we cry.
We cry abundant life for all,
knowing that we are slowly being suffocated by the pervasive evil of racism:
 some of us are choking;
 some of us cannot breathe;
 some of us are dead.

We cry peace,
knowing that we are the instruments of God's peace
and that such peace cannot exist without justice, equity, compassion, and God's grace.
We cry Emmanuel, God with us,
knowing that to God, every life matters—God is with all people—
even though as a community and as a society
we have stated through our actions that some lives matter more than others.
Compassionate One,
Help us to understand how racism finds life in our hearts and in our cries.
In this time of tense anticipation,
may we commit ourselves to be people of your way
crying and creating a path for justice, equity, and peace
for all people in this wilderness of hatred and racism.
Amen.

Sung Response: "The Kingdom of God" MV 146

The kingdom of God is justice and peace
and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Come, God, and open in us
the gates of your kingdom.

Scripture Readings:

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Thus says the LORD:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.
They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—who can understand it?
I the LORD test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

Luke 6:17-26

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

‘But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

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

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir Anthem: "African Psalm"

Reflection: "Blessedness"

Hymn: "Come Touch Our Hearts" MV 12 vs 1 -4

Come touch our hearts that we may know compassion,
from failing embers build a blazing fire;
love strong enough to overturn injustice,
to seek a world more gracious, come touch and bless our hearts

Come touch our souls that we may know and love you,
your quiet presence all our fears dispel;
create a space for spirit to grow in us,
let life and beauty fill us, come touch and bless our souls.

Come touch our minds and teach us how to reason,
set free our thoughts to wonder and to dream;
help us to open doors of understanding,
to welcome truth and wisdom, come touch and bless our minds.

Come touch us in the moments we are fragile,
and in our weakness your great strength reveal;
that we may rise to follow and to serve,
steady now our nerve, come touch and bless our will.

Virtual Offering:

One: Our gifts can root us in God's love and in our faith community.
Two: *Our humble offerings can grow a strong foundation for work and worship.*
One: May we be inspired to give faithfully and joyfully,
inspired to share our compassionate Christian spirit.
Two: *Giving God, may our own gifts be a source of hope and change for others,
may they have a positive and transformative effect in the world. Amen*

Sung Response: "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 we give.

Prayers of the People

One: Loving and creating God,
we thank you that humanity has been created to know joy,
experience wonder, and live in community.
Two: *We thank you for the ordinary joys of sun reflected off snow,
a warm blanket on a cold day,
the laughter shared with friends and family.*
One: We thank you, God, for the moments of wonder we feel
when we see images of vast oceans or endless starry skies,
or when we ponder the intricacies of a snow flake or a flower petal.
Two: *We offer thanks for the support and welcome of our community
of faith here at Applewood United Church,
for the many ways we have found to connect with each despite
pandemic restrictions and challenges.*
One: Compassionate God, we offer our prayers for all those who
struggle to know your joy because of the pain they carry –
the agony of loss, the ache of food or housing insecurity,
the sting of marginalization, and the pain of physical or mental illness.
Two: *We pray for those who have lost their sense of wonder –
those who are lonely or isolated,
those who are discouraged and hopeless,
those who feel their voices and their concerns are not heard.*
One: We offer our prayers to you, God, thankful that we can turn to you
as to a mother who watches over us,
and we gather all these prayers as we sing:

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 glory are yours
now and forever. Amen

Closing Hymn: "What A Friend We Have in Jesus" VU 664

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Christ the Saviour is our refuge;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do our friends despise, forsake us?
Are we tempted to despair?
Jesus' strength will shield our weakness,
and we'll find new courage there.

Commissioning /Blessing

May God, who sang the universe into being, go with you.
May Christ, who is God's love song to the world, attend you.
May the Holy Spirit continue to sing God's love
into each and every heart, each and every day.

Sung Amen: VU 974

Reflection

“Blessedness”

Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, sad, and expendable. Woe to you who are rich, full, happy, and popular. This week’s Gospel in two sentences, it seems. Blessed are those on the margins, blessed are those who have nothing but God. Woe to those distracted by material wealth and what the world describes as full lives – yet perhaps often empty of God. Blessed are those that the church has sometimes turned away, woe to those in seats of power.

Luke’s presentation of the beatitudes is much more raw and straight forward than Matthew’s. Luke’s contains just four blessings and 4 matching woes, as we heard. Matthew gives us that long list of nine, with no corresponding warnings for those who are not blessed. No wonder Matthew’s version is more popular – we can all perhaps find ourselves in one of those categories of blessedness that is presented there.

Where do we stand in this ‘good news’ that Jesus is sharing in Luke’s gospel? Where do we find ourselves - we who have likely spent more time in our lives not with those Jesus would call blessed, but with those upon whom he proclaims woe? Can we even call ourselves blessed? We are perhaps familiar with using that adjective to describe people who seem to be gifted by God in some way. We might say that someone is “blessed with good looks” or “blessed with musical talent.” We often seem to treat the word like it represents something we can collect or count, and those types of blessings just seem to be an addition to our material wealth or popularity.

Perhaps we can begin our self-examination and pondering by looking at the meaning of the word “blessed.” In both the Oxford English and Merriam-Webster dictionaries, it is defined as “having a sacred nature, connected with God, holy.” So when we are most vulnerable, most hungry and most hurting, the most afraid and pushed to the side, according to Jesus we are also the most holy, the most connected to God, the most sacred. When we seem to have it all – when we seem to be blessed in the way the world counts blessing, it is then when we are most disconnected, is at that time when we will not truly be able to attain deep connection with the Divine Creator.

In those the world counts as last and least, God places sacredness. With those who have nothing else, God supplies grace, hope, and holiness - blessedness. It is perhaps the starkest description of the ‘upside down’ good news of Jesus. When we are most vulnerable, when the world turns its back on us, that is where God can be found, that is when God is most present and active.

Think of our world today – of those who are poor and hungry and hurting and seem forgotten.

Indigenous communities in this country still struggling for access to clean water, families in Afghanistan or stuck in transit yearning for freedom from hunger and oppression, Rohingya refugees, those caught in violence in Burkina Faso. It is challenging for us to imagine these people as blessed in any way, but Jesus tells us that these are the ones to whom God offers a fuller life.

Are there times in your life when you have felt blessed – felt holy - felt connected to God? I know at my most difficult and challenging times, I definitely did not feel blessed. When my days were full of the weeping and yearning of grief, I did not feel holy. Yet I knew that God was not distant, I knew that I was often being held in prayer, and I was strengthened. I have not known the depths of poverty, I have not known hunger, but I have known vulnerability and I have known pain and certainly have known what it is like to be excluded. To know that God stands with us in those moments can give us hope and courage to continue.

With the promise of God's presence in our lowest moments, Jesus also shares with us a warning when he speaks of "woes." Distress will come to you when you are so rich that you feel you have no need of God. Anguish will come if you feel your life is so carefree that a relationship with God is not needed. Misery will be yours when all your efforts go to maintaining a standing in your community but no standing with God. I know that there are times in my life when I was far more concerned with status, I also know that compared to most around the globe, I live a wealthy and full life. The challenge is to let God into our lives, be willing to empty ourselves of the distractions of affluence and influence and privilege, so that there is room for holiness, space for connection to God, and the humility that must accompany blessedness, where there is only room for God.

That is the cost – the challenge – of discipleship. Drop your nets, give up your power, leave behind self-satisfaction and abandon the world's measurement of worth. Take on blessedness, and the holiness of others will be revealed. Become more vulnerable, and stand with those who have long been vulnerable in the world.

It is only when we can let go of our 'nets' of worldly prosperity and power that we can help others to know their own worth, their own blessedness. In this community, I believe becoming an Affirming congregation was just such an act. It was a choice to include, to intentionally show others that they, indeed, are blessed ones. Many in the LGBTQ + community have suffered spiritual, emotional and sometimes physical trauma from how church as they experienced it treated them. In conversation with folk from this community, I explain that here, we work to include - we have placed signs of welcome like the small Affirming rainbow on our entrance door, changed the signage on some of our washrooms, and recently added a Pride Flag on the building. Most often it is not gratitude that is expressed, but relief – the first sign of their recognition that we see them as blessed.

I believe we need each other to continue our journey to blessedness. We need to be able to remind each other to make space for God, remind each other that it is acceptable to be vulnerable, so that we can truly act for God's justice in the world. We can be part of bringing laughter to those who weep, fullness to those who hunger, acceptance to those on the margins. In doing so, we may find our own blessedness. May it be so.