

Worship at Home for June 28 2020

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please call or email me directly:
416-951-7911 minister@applewoodunited.ca

In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Centering Prayer

Like flowers that bloom in the summer sun,
may we be opened in body, mind and spirit
to hear God's words for us today. Amen

Opening Music: "O Love" by Elaine Hagenberg
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2cqblTDR8w>

Opening Prayer

God of prophets and visionaries, God of leaders and followers,
you call to us in many ways.
Keep us open to your voice calling in the many voices we hear each day,
keep us open to your message of love in what we see each day,
keep us moving toward justice and compassion in what we do each day.
Remind us that our own voices, actions and prayers
can make a difference in the world.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen

Scripture Jeremiah 28:5-9

Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; and the prophet Jeremiah said, 'Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfil the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.'

Reflection

This snippet of scripture from the life of the prophet Jeremiah gives us a little insight into a troubling period in the life of the Israelite people. Under attack by the nation of Babylon led by King Nebuchadnezzar, the prophet Hananiah asserts that God has told him that in two years Babylon would be defeated, prisoners freed, and all that is precious restored to them. They must rise up, they must resist, declares Hananiah. Jeremiah has been given a different message from God, one that might not be as popular, and he declares for peace under the yoke of Babylonian rule – while he is symbolically wearing a wooden yoke around his neck to show that God is using that rule to change the hearts and minds of God's people.

It is not unusual for us to encounter opposing viewpoints in our lives, in our churches, and certainly in our government. Recently the Province of Ontario told churches they could reopen with safety measures in this pandemic time. Like Jeremiah and his yoke, many churches are deciding to stay bound by pandemic protocols that tell us the safest place for us is at home, and leaving their buildings closed. Others are reopening, offering services and gathering (we hope safely) for worship. Which choice is the one that follows God's way? Which decisions are the 'right' ones?

How are YOU feeling about Applewood United's decision to remain closed for at least the summer, and perhaps longer?

While Jeremiah's story here definitely warns us about our desires to follow what we 'hope' is true, what we long for, what we want to be rather than what is God's course of action, no two situations are ever exactly the same. The 'church' is not simply our buildings, nor is it our ability to gather physically. We are not under attack from another nation, but by a microorganism that has no consciousness or plan. Our prophets may wear business suits, or sweat pants and hoodies, and their messages can be confusing.

The 'right' decisions in our time – I believe – are the ones that lead us to truly care for one another, and to seek to deepen our relationship with God. Will opening church buildings allow us to feed more hungry? Or house more homeless? Or do more justice? Will gathering together grow our relationship with God? The 'right' decisions come when we ask pointed questions, but also allow the space for God to be included in the answers. The 'right' decisions come when we allow ourselves to discern prayerfully, humbly, and with God's help. The 'right' decisions might not be the popular ones, the easy ones, the less painful ones.

That's what Jeremiah can still teach us today, that there are times when God's voice is not easy to hear, because that is not what we want. That is what Jesus continues to teach us today – God's way can be surprising, can set us in unexpected directions, can bring a peace that can be held in the heart when everything around seems changed or chaotic.

May it be so.

Music: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT8bybL_DqY

Prayers of the People

God of every nation, we thank you for this country we call home,
this country we call Canada – and for the diverse people with whom we share it.

We thank you for its beauty in rugged mountains, sweeping prairies,
wide rivers and majestic waterfalls. We thank you for the creatures that share our land –
beavers and polar bears, caribou and moose, puffins and loons.

We thank you, God, for the rich heritage of Canada's Indigenous Peoples, who have called this
space home for thousands of years, and for the opportunity we have to learn from them – even
though we may have squandered that opportunity in our past. We pray that you show us the
way to walk with them to chart a good path made from respect and acknowledgment.

We thank you, God, for those who have more recently arrived in Canada:
thanks for our European ancestors who were looking for new lands, and for folks who were
seeking religious freedom, thanks for those who came escaping famine in their countries of
origin, and for refugees seeking safer lives.

Thank you, God, for all those who have chosen to call Canada home.

We know, God, that even as we pray our gratitude for our country, there are still Canadians
who don't have enough to eat, or adequate housing, or clean water. As we offer our prayers for
them, lead us to right decisions to bring basic needs to all the people of our country.

We pray for our leaders – in parliament and provinces, in places of worship and places where
community is built. Give them the strength and courage to lead us in all times of challenge, and
especially as we continue to live with this pandemic which affects our lives together.

We pray for our families, our friends, our neighbours and our world, for those who are grieving,
for those who are ill, for those working to reopen shops and businesses and our economy, for
those who continue to put their health at risk caring for others.

We offer all our prayers to you, God, in the name of Jesus, in the hope of the Spirit. Amen

Closing music: "Go Make a Difference"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0A9F0HCJXw>

Blessing

Go into the world – in your circles, in your 'bubbles',
knowing you are held in God's care, held in the love of Christ,
and held by the Spirit's power. Amen

Music "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

A hymn written in Canada performed by a children's choir from Uganda called "Vision Choir"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwi_qKVI8lQ