

ZOOM Worship and Worship at Home for March 21, 2021

If you are reading this service only, you may focus on scriptures or hymn words, reflection or prayers, or simply read the document from beginning to end. If you are participating in the ZOOM call, you might print this as your bulletin for the service.

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!

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

To participate in the ZOOM worship over your telephone, call 647-374-4685 or 647-558-0588, and when asked enter this meeting id: **893 0928 0459** and this pass code: **271814**. You will hear the service and even be able to speak when it is appropriate.

In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Sunday, March 21
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement

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 Mississauga of the New 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.

Announcements

Centering Music: "Nothing can trouble" VU 290

**Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten, those who seek God will never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten, God alone fills us.**

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer:

One: You have told us, Holy One, that you will be our God

Two: *and we will be your people.*

One: We will be yours in challenging times,
in our weaknesses and struggles,

Two: *and you will be ours in times of celebration,
in times of virtual togetherness, and especially in our sadness.*

One: We will be yours no matter how we gather, no matter where we are,

Two: *and you will be ours in our living rooms and gardens,
in our kitchens and on our balconies,
and especially in our hearts.*

One: God of our inward beings and our outward journeys,
be with us as we worship you in this time.

Give us the courage to look deeply into our own hearts
so that they might be transformed by your love,
refreshed by your grace and forgiveness,
and renewed by your Spirit of truth and acceptance.

We pray in the name of the One who leads us in these Lenten days
the One who journeys with us every day,
Jesus the Christ. Amen

Opening Hymn: "Come Touch Our Hearts" MV 12

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 work 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 wills.

Come touch us now,
this people who are gathered,
to break the bread and share the cup of peace;
that we may love you with our heart, our soul,
our mind, our strength, our all,
come touch us with your grace.

Time of Confession:

One: God of promise and hope,
you call us to trust in your way
even when the way is difficult to see.

Two: *Sometimes we hesitate to follow you
and to make changes in our lives.*

One: Sometimes our priorities and commitments
reflect our personal interests, our own fears and insecurities
more than your desire for our lives and world.

Two: *Free us, O God, that we might open our hearts to change
and to faith, in the name of the Jesus, we pray.*

Time for personal reflection.

Words of Assurance

One: Jeremiah affirms God's promise of forgiveness,
proclaiming:
"I will forgive their iniquity
and I will remember their sin no more."

Two: *This is the Good News!
We are set free to begin life anew.
Thanks be to God!*

*Prayer of Confession and Words of Assurance from "Celebrate God's Presence" the United Church of
Canada, adapted and used with permission.*

Scripture Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34 *The Inclusive Bible*

Behold, the days are coming, says YHWH, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them up out of the land of Egypt – a covenant they broke, though I was their spouse, says YHWH. But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my Law in their minds and on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

No longer will they need to teach one another or remind one another to listen to YHWH. All of them, high and low alike, will listen to me, says YHWH, for I will forgive their misdeeds and will remember their sins no more.

Psalm 51:1-12 *The Inclusive Bible*

Oh God, have mercy on me!
Because of your love and your great compassion,
wipe away my faults;
wash me clean of my guilt;
purify me of my sin.
For I am aware of my faults,
and have my sin constantly in mind.
I sinned against you alone,
and did what is evil in your sight.
You are just when you pass sentence on me,
blameless when you give judgement.

I was born in sin,
conceived in sin-
yet you want truth to live in my innermost being.
Teach me your wisdom!
Purify me with hyssop until I am clean;
wash me until I am purer than new-fallen snow.
Instill some joy and gladness into me;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice again.
Turn your face from my sins,
and wipe out all my guilt.
O God, create a clean heart in me,
put into me a new and steadfast spirit;
do not banish me from your presence,
do not deprive me of your holy Spirit!
Be my saviour again, renew my joy,
Keep my spirit steady and willing.

Choir: "Let Us Pray"

Reflection: A Heart for God

Hymn: "The Servant Song" VU 595

We are pilgrims on a journey,
fellow travellers on the road,
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

Sister, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you,
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be me servant too.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear,
I will hold my hand out to you,
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've know together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you,
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant to.

Prayers of the People:

One: Holy God, on this first Sunday of spring we offer our thanks and praise
for the new life we anticipate – thanks for hidden seeds just beginning to warm
in the earth, thanks for songbirds beginning their journeys back to our skies.

Two: We thank you for longer days and warmer breezes, for rain that replenishes
and for the wind that stirs the leaves of last year's bounty and reminds us of
all that is to come.

One: We thank you, Compassionate God, for the people who care for us and about us –
our family and our friends, our church community, health care workers
and food industry workers, firefighters and police officers.

Two: We pray for those who are still on the front lines in this pandemic, God.
Give them health as they continue to take on risk,
give them strength and compassion in their work,
give them the courage to continue.

One: We pray for those closest to us, Holy Parent God – our own parents and children,
our partners and our friends, our neighbours and our church family.

Help us to care for them as you care for us.

Two: We pray for those who are distant, Justice Loving God – for the victims of race-motivated violence and crime, for refugees still trying to find a safe home, for those without shelter or enough food for their families.

Help us to care about them as you care about us.

One: We pray, God, confident that you hear and that you continue to name us as your people. Amen

Closing Hymn: “What Can I Do?” MV 191

What can I do? What can I bring?

What can I say? What can I sing?

I’ll sing with joy. I’ll say a prayer.

I’ll bring my love. I’ll do my share.

Blessing:

God goes with us as we leave this virtual space,
sending forgiveness and hope into every heart.

Jesus accompanies us as we return to the day’s activities –
sending acceptance and love into every life.

The Spirit surrounds us as we move into routines,
bringing energy and inspiration to every mind.

So go with hope, love and energy to continue to be God’s own in the world.

Amen

Rev. Joanne’s Reflection

As we approach Easter with the parades of Palm Sunday and the solemn processions of Good Friday through to the fear and joyful filled races to and from the tomb on Easter morning, perhaps we can pause and look inward. These two Hebrew Testament Readings are at the heart of what Lent can mean for us. They highlight the need for confession and for recognition of what lies in our hearts, but also the desire to be in ‘right relationship’ with God. In the words of the psalmist, “O God, create a clean heart in me, put into me a new and steadfast spirit.”

Jeremiah wrote his prophecy in a tempestuous time, and actually seemed to have had a fairly tempestuous relationship with God as well. The Hebrew people were living in exile, the temple had been destroyed, the line of Davidic kings broken. The destruction of these symbols of God’s covenant with God’s people was devastating. Yet in Jeremiah’s words God speaks – God will do a new thing – God will write the law not on tablets that can be ignored or destroyed, but on the living hearts of a living people, God’s people. Furthermore, God will offer forgiveness, and in case you thought that calamity was God’s doing in retribution for our bad behaviour, God will remember our sins no more.

We are living in a tempestuous time, and perhaps we may feel that our relationship with God has suffered. We are living in exile from our churches, and from one another. The loss can be

devastating. Yet we can still hear God speaking to us in Jeremiah's words, we can still be reminded that God continues to do a new thing, and continues to write law and love onto our hearts, if we can take the time to look inward and realize that. Furthermore, God offers forgiveness, and not calamity, God gives peace in the midst of upheaval, God can offer love even as we choose to offer our confessions.

Thinking of both Jeremiah's prophetic words, and the psalm, what does a clean heart etched with God's law actually look like, or feel like? Can we attain it? In the psalm, that seems to mean a heart that is 'clean', a heart that is 'pure'. I'm sure the medical community could tell us something about clean hearts, perhaps a young heart, free of the sign of aging. Of course that kind of clean heart isn't quite what either Jeremiah or the psalm writer had in mind, but perhaps the idea – a young-seeming heart heart is a cleaner heart, might help us in our own journey to being aware of God's presence there.

A young heart has perhaps been less burdened by life's experiences, and may be more 'flexible' and open to accepting God's way. A young heart may find it easier to acknowledge sin, or distance from God. Yet even older hearts have the opportunity to be renewed, because we are forgiven, because we are God's own. We are given the opportunity to name those things that might keep our hearts 'old' that might keep us distant from God or distant from right relationships with God's people and God's creation. In God's love, we can all be like young ones, our hearts are never too full to be able to follow God's path in some way, or simply bask in what Jeremiah called that new covenant based on God's complete love and acceptance.

How do we get ready for that? How can we confess, and remain open to God's forgiveness that will both cleanse our hearts and give us willing spirits? It isn't really about feeling guilty, but an examination of where our hearts and spirits might grow. As you watch the news, think about your feelings when you hear or read a story – how does it make you feel? Does it uncover fear, or hidden insecurities? Does it open compassion in you or give you an opportunity to learn? You could ponder what you value most in your life, especially in this time of pandemic, and think about how those valued things make you feel. And in all these ponderings, ask God to accompany you, Christ to guide you, and the Spirit to open your heart.

These inward looks, this willing heart marked by God, can make a difference in the world. Each of our decisions – about what we buy and where or who we buy from, about how we invest our time and financial resources, about who we communicate with and how we communicate – has an impact on the world. And these decisions can be tempered, shaped, and inspired by hearts that have become open to God who calls us God's own.

Thanks to God who continues to do things in and through us, who continues to write on our hearts and minds. Amen