

ZOOM Worship for May 16, 2021
7th Sunday of Easter

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 Mississauga 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.

Announcements

Centering Music: “Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New” MV 115

Behold, (behold,) behold (behold,) I make all things new,
beginning with you and starting from today.
Behold, (behold,) behold (behold,) I make all things new,
my promise is true, for I am Christ the way.

Call to Worship: (responsive)

One: We are called to be the church, to love and serve others.

All: We gather as sisters and brothers in Christ, praising God’s faithfulness, embracing each other in God’s love, committed to acting out that love in God’s world.

One: We worship God in joy, in expectation, and in hope.

All: We are not alone. Thanks be to God. -William Phipps

Opening Prayer: (prayed together)

God of each new day: We come in worship seeking again to hear the good news of your unceasing love. May that love permeate every aspect of our living. Grant that our worship may renew us, and that our lives may participate in the renewal of your world. We ask this as your people and because you are our God. -Laura Turnbull

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.

Opening Hymn: “God of The Bible” MV 28 Vs 1, 2, 5

God of the Bible, God in the Gospel,
hope seen in Jesus, hope yet to come,
you are our centre, daylight or darkness,
freedom or prison, you are our home.

Fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise,
God always faithful you do not change.
Fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise,
God always faithful, you do not change.

Those without status, those you are nothing,
you have made royal, gifted with rights,
chosen as partners, midwives of justice,
birthing new systems, lighting new lights.

Scripture reading: Romans 12: 3 – 21 (NRSV)

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Marks of the True Christian

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; ^[c] for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Choir: “This We Pray”

Reflection: One Church - Four Kinds of Believers

Hymn: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" VU 602

Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the unity of heart and mind
is like to that above.

Before our Maker's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
each other's burdens bear;
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

This glorious hope revives
our courage on the way;
that we shall live in perfect love
in God's eternal day.

Offering Invitation

Prayer of Dedication: (prayed together)

God of all people and God of all places, we present these offerings, that they may be used to extend your liberating reign. With them we offer our varied ministries, that each of us may be part of your answer to the cries of the world. Amen

- Ronald Black

Prayers of the People

Closing Hymn: "You Shall Go Out With Joy" VU 884

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace;
the mountains and the hills
will break forth before you;
there'll be shouts of joy,
and all the trees of the field
will clap, will clap their hands!

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands,
(clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands,
(clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands
(clap, clap)
while you go out with joy.

Blessing:

One: We have worshipped, joining together in the praise of God, Creator, Christ and Spirit.

All: Let us depart, blessed and challenged to live sensitive to the Spirit's leading witnessing to the living Christ.

Reflection - Rev. Dale Burkart

ONE CHURCH – FOUR KINDS OF BELIEVERS

(Scripture: Romans 12: 3 – 21)

Belief within the United Church of Canada has always been diverse. This should not surprise us as the United Church came into being with the amalgamation of Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Free congregations spread across a vast land mass.

Add to the mix thousands and thousands of individuals brought into this new denomination with their differences. A Church proud of its openness and ecumenical spirit has always lived with tension pertaining to matters of faith and personal beliefs.

The office administrator at a church I served in Ottawa would strenuously take issue with me on theological matters often at the most inopportune times. One of her pronouncements was "I don't believe in God, I believe in the Church." A short time later she would stick her head in my office and exclaim, "But I have been known to be wrong." She grew up in the 1950s attending a United Church in Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

From time to time, the ghost of Jack, a former Church Trustee at St. Paul's in Sarnia, would arise at St. Paul's Council meetings. He had died long before I arrived. Jack had made a number of strong pronouncements in his time on property matters. Each time Jack's name or view on a particular property matter would arise someone would add "he was an atheist."

A few years ago I attended a seminar at North Bramalea United Church. During the question and answer session a minister asked, "How do I minister to a congregation that is composed of people strongly supportive of Bishop John Spong's way of thinking while others think along the lines of Billy Graham?"

I volunteered an answer. A minister can only truly minister out of her or his own beliefs and faith, not someone else's.

Rev. Wayne Hilliker served Chalmers United in Kingston, Ontario for many years. He offers a very interesting insight which pertains to ministering in the United Church of Canada.

"The greatest differences . . . are not between people who believe different things, but between people who believe the same things but believe them differently. That's where the conflict is much stronger. I can be closer with a Muslim, Jew or Buddhist, than with some people in my denomination who view the Bible differently, who don't recognize that maybe God is blessing the distinctiveness in religions, and that there are universal graces that are operating in other faiths."

The challenge can be enormous. How do we live together in Christian community with such diversity? First of all, I think we need to recognize the diversity within our community and in the larger United Church.

The different faithstyles found within the United Church has been a topic of study. In 1994 the Rev. Wilena Brown gifted the United Church and its ministers with a book entitled **“Faithstyles in Congregations – Living Together in a Christian Community.”**

Wilena ordained in 1953 says she saw 3 primary faithstyles within the congregations she served.

- **Look at Rev. Brown’s findings** (see attachment)

In 2011 the United Church Observer conducted a faith survey of their readership. You may have responded to this survey. The people tabulating the results grouped the responders into 4 belief systems or what Rev. Brown called faithstyles.

- **Look at The Observer findings** (see attachment)

We are not all the same and none of us can make anyone think like us. To live in community means mutual respect, sacrifice, humility, understanding and at times compromise.

The idea of sacrificing for relationships comes out clearly time and time again in scripture where God makes sacrifices in order to live with us.

Paul in Roman 12 calls upon us to offer ourselves to God. Offering ourselves to God means letting God change the way we think from a focus on ourselves to a focus on God and God’s love for all people.

God has made us diverse with different personalities, skills, talents, abilities. Each community requires the pooling of gifts to bring about what God desires, love for God and the well being of the created order.

Paul sets out some standards for Christian living. Be sincere in your love for others. Hate what is evil, i.e. hurting of others. Honour others more than you do yourself. These words are clearly designed to strengthen relationships and build community.

Frederick Nietzsche, an atheistic existentialist, a minister’s kid, out of his experience said, “Christians need to look more redeemed.” Paul says, “Let your hope make you glad.”

Take care of God’s needy people and welcome strangers. Be happy with those who are happy and mourn with those who are mourning.

Don’t be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Live your faith not with the mindset that “I’m right and you’re wrong” but more like “Here’s what I have found. Here’s what I have experienced. I’ll be glad to share it with you if you’re interested.”

Make friends with ordinary people. Do your best to live in peace with everyone.

Ask God to bless those who mistreat you. Don’t seek revenge. Don’t let your enemies or evil defeat you but defeat them with loving acts.

My brother in Calgary shared this with me. An evangelical minister he knows was elected to be a Calgary School Trustee. Another trustee, someone who saw themselves as an atheist, aware of the minister's background, at their first meeting together came up to him and said, "We'll probably not get along very well." The minister's response, "Oh, I'm not so sure." The point of telling you this story is that they managed to get along.

Gerald Vandezande, a Parliament Hill lobbyist from Toronto for Citizens for Public Justice taught me some valuable lessons concerning interacting with people you disagree with. Gerald shared with me an exchange he had earlier that day with a Member of Parliament whose view on an issue he disagreed with. Gerald, "I disagree with you 100% but I love you" and gave the MP a hug. Gerald, a devout Christian, strenuously fought polarization in the broader Christian Church and in politics.

Romans 12 offers us guidelines for living together in a diverse Christian community. And remember we do not do this hard work alone but through prayer we can seek the Holy Spirit's assistance. The Holy Spirit is active in us and other members of the faith community and the larger church.

Each individual and each faith community is a living, growing organism, and present limitations are relative, not absolute boundaries. So live in hope and with joy. Be open and willing to learn new things for God is not finished with any of us yet.

Four Kinds of Believers

"Faithstyles in Congregations - Living Together in a Christian Community" Rev. Wilena Brown, ordained 1953

3 faithstyles in United Church congregations:

1. Community faithstyle - dominant, authority lies in their community of faith: its traditions, its shared experiences, its formal faith statements and accepted practices. The individual is expected to conform to community standards.
2. Searching faithstyle - the source of authority is one's own mind and what one believes to be the truth. They tend to question everything.
3. Partnership faithstyle - authority rests in God and Self or Self and God. Partners emphasize time with God and seek to find God's leadership and companionship for their lives.

2011 United Church Observer Survey - Observer readers fall into four distinct groups

1. Mainliners - 44%, Bible based theology with concern for the practical implications of the Gospel, especially social justice. Bible inspired by God but composed by humans. Accept different interpretations of the Bible. Jesus seen as role model for living.
2. Intuitives - 35%, feeling the presence or reality of God as something beyond themselves or within themselves important. Bible is of middling importance to their faith. Prayer is important. Jesus is role model for living. "Know God for ourselves."

3. Traditionalists - 13%, main inspiration is the Bible which is seen as divinely inspired. Creeds important. Want to bring Christ to the centre of the church and our lives.
4. Nonconformists - 8%, belief in God depends on what you mean by God, do not conceive of God as personal, some don't believe in God at all. Bible a collection of writing by humans trying to advance religious understanding. See spirituality permeating everything. Rarely pray. Jesus seen as reformer, political rebel. Some who thought "outside of the box."