

**ZOOM Worship for, October 10, 2021
Thanksgiving Sunday**

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.

Centering Music: "Grateful" MV 182

Grateful for the life you give us,
thankful for your Holy Son,
joyful in your Spirit flowing
over all, O God of Love.

Grateful for the Bread of Heaven,
thankful for your Holy Word,
joyful in your mercy flowing,
we will praise you, God.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: The birds in the skies sing thanks and praise to Creator God.

Two: *The winds blow with gratitude, the rains fall with thankfulness.*

One: With all creation, your people, God, gather to sing thanks and praise,

Two: *scattered like seeds we come together with gratitude and thankfulness.*

One: Scattered like seeds, we are nourished by the abundance of your grace.

Two: *Gathered like the harvest, we see your rich abundance on our computers and devices, in emails and over telephone lines.*

One: Gathered like the harvest, we have come to worship God, and to pray:

Two: *Creator God,
we come to celebrate the beauty and bounty
of your good earth:*

One: glorious blue skies and blazing fall colours;
fields ripe for harvest;
gardens overflowing with goodness.

Two: *Grow in us thankful hearts, God,
so that our prayers and our lives overflow with gratitude.*

One: We offer this worship, and our whole selves, to your glory, now and always.
Amen.

Opening Hymn: "We Plough the Fields and Scatter" VU 520

We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by your almighty hand;

you send the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.
All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
we thank you, God, O holy God,
for all your love.

You only are the maker
of all things near and far;
you paint the wayside flower,
you light the evening star;
the winds and waves obey you,
by you the birds are fed;
much more to us, your children,
you give us daily bread. R

We thank you then, O Maker,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food;
accept the gifts we offer
for all your love imparts,
and, what from us you long for,
our humble, thankful hearts. R

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation “Harvest Wrappings”

God hides living seeds
in rosy apples, ripening pears
and juicy oranges;
in red tomatoes, rounded rutabagas
and long, green dangling runner beans.
To hang the trees with purple plums
God sends the sun and rain in bouts,
and vines with luscious grapes are decked
while fields yield broccoli and sprouts.

As harvest-time returns,
the varied ways God wraps
life-giving seeds
make for a colourful display
of fruit and flower of every kind;
beauty of pattern and design.
This is a feast for all to share,
filling our hearts with gratitude
for God’s incessant love and care.

So when, in many lands,
we eat the fruit and sow the seeds
in partnership with God,
God feeds us with delicious food,
renewing body, mind and soul,
and blesses us in many ways.
Then we, in glad responsive love,
will give God joyful thanks and praise.

Written by Beryl Chatfield from the collection "Acorns and Archangels" adapted and used with permission.

Sung Response: "Sing to the Lord of Harvest" VU 519 verse 1 only

Sing to the Lord of harvest,
sing songs of love and praise,
with joyful hearts and voices
your hallelujahs raise;
by whom the rolling seasons
in fruitful order move;
sing to the Lord of harvest
a joyful song of love.

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 126 NRSV

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
'The Lord has done great things for them.'
The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Matthew 6:25-33 *The Inclusive Bible*

That's why I tell you not to worry about your livelihood, what you are to eat or drink or use for clothing. Isn't life more than just food? Isn't the body more than just clothes?

"Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet our God in heaven feeds them. Aren't you more important than they? Which of you by worrying can add a moment to your lifespan? And why be anxious about clothing? Learn a lesson from the way the

wildflowers grow. They don't work; they don't spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in full splendor was arrayed like one of these. If God can clothe in such splendor the grasses of the field, which bloom today and are thrown on the fire tomorrow, won't God do so much more for you—you who have so little faith?

"Stop worrying, then, over questions such as, 'What are we to eat,' or 'what are we to drink,' or 'what are we to wear?'" Those without faith are always running after these things. God knows everything you need. Seek first God's reign, and God's justice, and all these things will be given to you besides.

Choir: "Simple Thanks"

Reflection: "Why worry?"

Hymn: "Seek Ye First" VU 356

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
and God's righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Hallelu, hallelujah.

Ask and it shall be given unto you;
seek and you shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened unto you.
Hallelu, hallelujah.

We do not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Hallelu, hallelujah.

Virtual Offering:

One: Giving and loving God, today many of us will prepare to feast.

Two: *In our thankful feasting, remind us that we are called to fill others,
in our grateful celebrating, remind us that we are to include others.*

One: In all the ways that we make our offerings to you, God,
through our time shared, with our skills deployed,
in donations from our financial resources –

Two: *may your love and hope be made known.
Amen*

Sung Response: VU 518 Verse 3

With gratitude and humble trust
we bring our best to you,
not just to serve your cause, but share
your love with neighbours too.
O God, who gave yourself to us
in Jesus Christ, your son,
help us to give ourselves each day
until life's work is done.

Prayers of the People:

- One: Holy and Creating God, on this Thanksgiving Sunday
we offer up our gratitude with our hearts and with our whole selves.
You are God of farm and field, you are God of soil and root,
and we thank you for all that grows – for trees and for children,
for our spirits, for our awareness of the need for your love
and justice in our community and our world.
- Two: *We offer our prayers for all those who help us – and your creation –
to flourish in many ways:
those who work the land, and those who work with their minds,
those who work with their hands, and those who work with their spirits.
We thank you for farmers and scientists, teachers and healers,
faith leaders and faith seekers.
We remember those who are using their gifts and skills to help
us find a safe way through the pandemic –
public health workers and mental health workers,
retail and restaurant workers still following protocols.*
- One: God of water and rock, we thank you for storms and rains
that can wash away the debris that clutters our lives.
Remind us that water can be both nourishing and destructive,
as we offer our prayers for all those who are suffering through unexpected rains,
severe storms and weather, flooding, drought, and other effects of climate change.
- Two: *We pray for all those who live within the storm of exclusion:
our siblings in the LGBTQ+ community,
black, indigenous and people of colour who are living with the storm of racism
and with the harshest effects of the COVID-19 virus,
all those who experience food or income insecurity,
all those who experience uncertainty.*
- One: God of wind and branch, of the Spirit's breath,
we thank you for resilience and for flexibility,
for forests that return after fire,
for monarch butterflies on their journeys to transformation,
for hearts that find healing after loss and pain.
- Two: *Today we lift our prayers for all those experiencing loss –
the loss of large family gatherings again this thanksgiving,
the loss of a friend or family member,
the loss of physical or mental health,
the loss of work or purpose.
We especially pray for those who have lost hope, lost faith, lost security,
lost direction in these continuing strange times.*
- One: God of feathered creatures, furry creatures, scaly creatures,
and our human kindred,
we remember with gratitude that we are called to hold all creation in our care,
just as you care for us.

We thank you for our families and friends – human and other -
that shower us in love, comfort us in time of need,
and laugh with us in times of celebration.
We pray for those on the margins of our communities:
the homeless, the hungry, the lonely and misunderstood.

*Two: Loving God, remind us that we are the hands and feet
of the compassionate and caring Christ in the world.
May we all learn to offer his radical welcome,
touch one another's lives and hearts with his healing and hope,
and offer our grateful praise to you always as we share the
words that Jesus gave us -*

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: "Give Thanks, My Soul, For Harvest" VU 522

Give thanks, my soul, for harvest,
for store of fruit and grain;
but know the owner gives so
that we may share again.
Where people suffer hunger,
or little children cry,
with gifts from God's rich bounty
may thankfulness reply.

Give thanks, my soul, for riches
of woodland, mine, and hill;
but know that gold and timber
are the Creator's still.
God lends to us, as stewards,
abundance we might share,
and thus provide earth's children
the blessing of God's care.

Give thanks, my soul, for labours,
that strength and days employ;
but know the Maker's purpose

brings toil as well as joy.
Show forth, O God, your purpose;
direct our will and hand
to share your love and bounty
with all in every land.

Commissioning /Blessing

May God, who clothes the lilies of the fields,
and feeds the birds of the sky,
who leads the lambs to pasture and the deer to water,
who multiplied loaves and fishes and changed water into wine,
lead us, feed us, and change us
to reflect the glory of our Creator,
to whom we offer praise and thanksgiving.
Amen

Sung Amen VU 431

Reflection "Why worry?"

As I sat across from the nurse who was about to administer my nasal swab for a covid-19 PCR test, she told me that I was looking anxious, and was there anything she could say or do to make me feel less worried about what she was doing. I wondered what she saw in me that caused her comment. I wonder what Jesus saw in the crowds as he taught in this scripture passage from the Sermon on the Mount to have him spend his time talking about worry and anxiety?

He had just been talking about money, a topic he returned to regularly, and certainly one that could cause anxiety. He was telling those who listened that they could not serve God and wealth. But now Jesus tells them not to worry, not to be concerned like those who have no faith. The Greek word used for worry, “merimnaō/μεριμνάω” is repeated six times in this passage. According to many biblical commentators this word represents not just worry, but “internal disturbance at the emotional and psychological level that disrupts life.”

We might ask “really, Jesus? You don’t think we should be anxious about the basics of life? About feeding ourselves or our families, about shelter or warmth or clothing - or the spread of coronavirus?” I think Jesus’ words are hard for us to hear sometimes - we live in a time and culture that breeds worry and anxiety where advertisers create an atmosphere of want and scarcity, where housing prices and gas prices are skyrocketing and food prices soar, where changes can happen rapidly in our lives. In these pandemic days, we may still be worrying about being exposed to the corona virus that causes COVID-19, we may be worried about the vaccination status of our friends or family members. We could be worried if there will be enough turkey for the crowd, or worried about those who are travelling over this weekend.

Imagine these words being heard by those who had gathered in their occupied country on a hilltop to listen to a radical teacher, folk who also had much to be anxious about. Not worry? Not worry about the Roman occupiers? Not worry about gathering or growing enough food? Not worry about disease, about shelter? For those first century listeners and for us today, worry is hard-wired into our brains.

Scientists tell us it actually has a location, coming from the amygdala, and is an extremely ancient part of our bodies. We are literally made to worry!

I will admit that I am one of those folk who tend to worry. I tell myself that I worry so that I can be prepared. If I have worried over and thought through every possible scenario for disaster, then I am ready for anything. What if the internet doesn't work right before ZOOM worship begins? What if my spare tire has a hole in it? What if the grocery stores run out of basic items again?

If I am honest with myself, my worry is likely more related to a lack of trust or lack of confidence. That lack of trust could be in my own abilities, or lack of faith in my skills and creativity. Perhaps sometimes I lack faith in the Spirit who accompanies each of us. Trust in many ways seems to be the opposite of or the anecdote to my worry.

We have heard or read what Jesus said in today's scripture – trust in God. Look around you at the life that thrives, look at birds soaring on air currents and finding nourishment, look at flowers growing and flourishing in the soil. See in creation that God provides, and know that God provides what we need – and be realistic. Worry does not bring hope, all our agonizing and lost sleep and apprehension about what may be does not affect the outcome of what we cannot control. Get busy with the work of God's reign, God's justice, and you will find you have what you need.

Howard was a retired minister who lived in a retirement facility where I led monthly services with Applewood volunteers before the pandemic. Howard was losing his sight and some mobility as he got closer to his 95th birthday, but one thing that Howard never lost was his trust in God, and his gratitude for God's love. God is good, he would often remark – God provides – relationships, love, and presence in the face of change or uncertainty. At one of our last gatherings Howard sang for us – a song he had learned in childhood about the caterpillar who yearned to fly, trusted in God, and was transformed to the butterfly. Trust and gratitude can allow us to change, to be transformed, and to move away from worry.

Take a chance, make a change, Jesus says – stop worrying about the basics, he says. Use trust to help you, use God's purpose to guide you. Perhaps many of us aren't worried about the basics, about our livelihoods, but I know some of us are anxious about our community of faith, about the future and about when we might return to any kind of 'normal' in our own lives and in the life of the church.

In our new pandemic-shaped reality, in our new way of gathering, perhaps some of us believe that there is still much to worry about. How will we function in this new way of being and doing the work of the church? How can we plan for every eventuality when we don't always have a clear path, or proven ways of accomplishing our work? How can we be transformed from those who worry to those who are less anxious?

The answer may well be in trusting each other ... that we have the skills we need, the imagination we need, the hope we need; trusting in God who is not finished with us, or with the work of this Applewood United Church. And on this Thanksgiving Sunday, we can remember that gratitude can also transform our lives and our hearts.

As it turns out, we are also hard-wired to trust one another. Researchers publishing in the Journal of Neuroscience have noted that the ventral striatum and medial prefrontal cortex areas in our brains become more active when we are actively trusting. And gratitude, when practiced, floods the

emotional centres of our brain with helpful chemicals. Living thankfully and sharing our gratitude as well as our trust is actually healthy for us physically as well as spiritually. Yes, God has created us to be anxious, but also with the physical means to allow us to thrive and flourish, grounded in our faith.

I would hazard a guess that if we are constantly worried about small things, we will miss the opportunity to really grow into this ever-shifting time in our church. If our focus remains small, stunted by fear or worry, then so will what we accomplish. Like my late friend Howard, trust in one another and gratitude for God's gifts may well set us free to soar. Trusting in God - who is so much more than an ally in our work but at the very core of who we are and what we do - can transform our fears into hopefulness and a passion for God's work. United Church minister and blogger David Ewart writes that if we trust that God is still present in our current circumstance - then we can indeed stop worrying about tomorrow.

At the end of this passage, Jesus gives us direction on how to turn from worry to trust, from anxiety to faith and gratitude: know God deeply and confidently, know that God holds us in love and care, and seek God's reign and God's justice - seek out opportunities to care for the vulnerable, to offer care and hope - to be the church that we are needed to be in this world.

Jesus must have known it would be difficult for his followers not to worry, not to be distracted by their day to day fears and concerns. God knows that today we can be challenged to leave worry and anxiety behind as we work together, as we continue to walk together surrounded by uncertainty. Yet as much as we have the capacity for apprehension, we also have been given the gift of faith, of trust, of gratitude, and of relationship with one another and with God. May we find hope in that growing trust, may we find inspiration and confidence in the faith and gratitude we share, and may we be blessed in what we do. Amen