

**ZOOM Worship for September 19, 2021
17th Sunday after Pentecost**

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: "Gather Us In" MV 7

Gather us in, ground us in you.

Gather us in, ground us in you.

Gather us in, gather us in,
ground us, ground us in you.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: We are called to gather by our Creator God,

Two: *sharing our time, sharing our lives,
sharing our concerns and our joys.*

One: We are called to draw nearer to God,
to our faith community,
and to God's creation in this Season of Creation.

Two: *We come searching for connection,
we come yearning to rejoice,
we come on screens and over telephones
but holding each other in our hearts.*

One: Let us rejoice in each other's company,
let us celebrate our loving and creating God,
let us open ourselves to joy as we worship today!

Two: *Hear us as we pray, O God, for your presence
in our virtual midst,*

One: for your inspiring Spirit to connect us
and energize us,

Two: *for the love of Christ to be revealed to us
and through us. Amen*

Opening Hymn: "Sing a Happy Hallelujah" VU 224

Sing a happy hallelujah,
sing it out with heart and style,
we're the echo of God's laughter,
we're the image of God's smile.
Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!
Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!

We're the proof of God's good humour,
we're the twinkle in God's eye,
made to shine, reflect the glory,
given light and space to fly. R

Sarah laughed at God's good timing,
Mary sang and David danced,
Jesus smiled and hugged the children,
so is life for us enhanced. R

Every day sing hallelujah!
We are loved, though so absurd,
human, foolish, chosen people,
God still takes us at our word! R

Welcoming our Returning Minister

One: As we sent Joanne into her Sabbatical time last May, we prayed that she find blessings of prayer, rest, renewal, learning, and new experiences. With her return to the Applewood Community of faith, we look forward to sharing her new insights and revelations as we begin our reunited journey of ministry.

All: May God bless our shared ministry, as we walk together once again.

Two: Joanne, we welcome you back to your ministry among us, with thanksgiving for all those who have offered their time, energy and gifts for ministry while you were on sabbatical leave, especially Rev. Dale Burkart, committee chairs and members, working group participants, and other Applewood staff.

All: May God bless our shared ministry, as we walk together once again.

Three: Both as community and as individuals, we were given the opportunity to experience our work and worship differently, and with other leadership, over the past four months. We pray that the different experiences of worship and work Joanne has encountered during her sabbatical have enriched and inspired her as we have been enriched and inspired.

All: May God bless our shared ministry, as we walk together once again.

Rev Joanne: I return to the Applewood United Church community with joy and with gratitude for the gift of time I was given. I am refreshed, renewed and eager to continue our work together as God's beloved people, and to continue my ministry among you as I share the blessings of my sabbatical time.

All: May God bless our shared ministry, as we walk together once again.

One: Let us lift our hearts to God with grateful prayers:

God of the new and the familiar, God of journeys and returnings,
we thank you for all that our minister's sabbatical time may have brought to us,
and to her. We thank you for her safe return to Applewood, and pray that we will all return safely to our church building in the weeks and months to come.

Two: Jesus our teacher and friend, your example of taking time away to pray and be renewed has been lived out in our community. Continue to walk with us, and open us to your just and loving ways as we strive to keep on a path that makes space for prayer, for rest, and for loving action.

Three: Restless and relentless Spirit of God, your persistent presence has kept us, and continues to keeps us, connected and inspired. We are grateful that you have swirled through our minister's

sabbatical journey, just as you have accompanied us here. We lift our own spirits and voices in praise and thanksgiving, in gratitude and hope, as we mark her return to our community.

Sung Response: “Alleluia” MV 50

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Scripture Readings:

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a *The Inclusive Bible*

If there are any wise and learned among you, let them show it by good living – with humility, and with wisdom in their actions. But if you have the bitterness of jealousy and self-seeking ambition in your hearts, be careful or you’ll find yourself becoming arrogant and covering up the truth with lies. This kind of “wisdom” doesn’t come down from above. It’s earthbound, animal-like and demonic. Where there is jealousy and ambition, there is also disharmony and wickedness of every kind. The wisdom from above, however, has purity as its essence. It works for peace, it’s kind and considerate. It’s full of compassion and shows itself by doing good. Nor is there any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it. Peacemakers, when they work for peace, sow the seeds which will bear fruit in holiness.

Where do these conflicts and battles among you first start? Isn’t it that they come from the desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it, so you’re prepared to kill to get it. You have ambitions that you can’t satisfy, so you fight to get your way by force. The reason you don’t have what you want is that you don’t ask for it in prayer. And when you do ask and don’t get it, it’s because you haven’t prayed properly. You have prayed in order to indulge your own pleasures.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the Devil, and it will flee from you. Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you.

Mark 9:30-37

They left that district and began a journey through Galilee, but Jesus did not want anyone to know about it. He was teaching the disciples along these lines: “The Promised One is going to be delivered into the hands of others and will be put to death, but three days later this One will rise again.” Though they failed to understand these words, they were afraid to question him.

They returned home to Capernaum. Once they were inside the house, Jesus began to ask them, “What were you discussing on the way home?” At this they fell silent, for on the way they had been arguing about who among them was the most important. So Jesus sat down and called the Twelve over, and said, “If any of you wants to be first, you must be last one of all and at the service of all.”

Then Jesus brought a little child into their midst, and putting his arm around the child, said to them, “Whoever welcomes a child such as this for my sake welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the One who sent me.”

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Thanks be to God.

Choir: "With Respect in Creation" (Words and music by David Kai)

Reflection: Drawing Near to God

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 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.

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.

Virtual Offering:

One: We are blessed by God, who asks us to be open to giving and receiving, to offering and accepting, and to sharing love and compassion freely with all God’s creation.
May we find ways to share with this community and with one another in gratitude and hope,
and may our gifts be both blessed and blessing. Amen

Sung Response: “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.

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer:

One: Holy One, in this Season of Creation,
we offer thanks for the wonders of the planet
which you have created and for which we must offer
care and respect.

Two: *We thank you for the trees that provide shade and oxygen,
habitat for forest and urban creatures alike,
and inspiration for humankind.*

One: We thank you for living creatures of the air, the land and the sea,
and for the spaces in which they live and thrive.

*Two: Abiding One, on this day before a Federal Election
we thank you that we live in a country where all can vote
freely, despite our differing points of view.*

One: Remind us that we can make faithful choices in our voting decisions
on who will lead us as a diverse nation.

*Two: Today, God, we remember those whose voices have not always
been heard through our government's decisions including Indigenous children and families,
racialized individuals, those with food or housing insecurity and others on the margins of our
living.*

One: Remind us, loving God, that we are one family not only here in Canada, but around the globe. A
family that has vulnerable members, sickness and fear, a need for justice and hope.
Help us to pray for each other and the world, even as we pray to you
as Jesus taught us:

*Two: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
forever and ever.*

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

(Recognizing the celebration of the 10th anniversary of National Tree Day on Wednesday, September 22)

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.

Commissioning and Blessing:

As we leave this time of worship, may God, who sang the universe into being, lead you,
and may Jesus Christ, God's love song to the world, attend you,

and may the Holy Spirit surround you as God's love is sung into each and every heart,
each and every day.

Amen

Choral Blessing: "Peace Be With You" MV 215

Reflection Drawing Near to God

It is a joy to be back at Applewood and gathering virtually with you all! The past four months have been rich in many ways, and I look forward to sharing some of my experiences with you as we worship and work together in the coming months. As a new grandmother, I was thrilled to see this passage from Mark's gospel in the lectionary readings for my first Sunday preaching in many weeks. Of course I could speak of God's handiwork and God's love in the innocent eyes of a child – especially my precious grandson Julian. Here was my opportunity to speak about him for 10 to 20 uninterrupted minutes - and of course I could describe all the ways that he has helped me to celebrate God!

But instead it was words from today's epistle to which I was drawn, where I believe the Spirit focused my attention. "Draw near to God," writes James, "and God will draw near to you." Draw near to God as you seek "wisdom from above" that may be very different from worldly wisdom that can be self-indulgent or self-serving. Draw near to God as you live a life that reflects the wisdom of peace, of compassion, of good works, and God will draw near to you.

I think Jesus had a similar message when he brought a child into the circle of his arms and into the circle of his teaching when he spoke with his arguing disciples. Do you want to experience God? Do you want to feel closer to the divine in me? Then look to the child and accept this vulnerable one, this powerless one, this sometimes fragile one. Welcome and value the child, and you welcome and value me, and so in turn you welcome and value God, and you will find that God draws you close.

Both Jesus and James give us radical views of living, where we are called to be servants of all – and so seeking the best for all. They describe a way of life where we seek God in the face of those who are vulnerable and those who live at the mercy of others who desire to be bigger and stronger, where drawing near to God means living selflessly and humbly. This is also a world view in which we truly value God's presence, truly desire to be drawn closer to the divine.

I think that there may be times when we feel we do not want that nearness to God. I know that during my time away, I had days when I did not pray, and some when I actually felt some anger at God who seemed distant – particularly when the bones of hundreds and hundreds of children were found buried on the grounds of residential schools, when fires consumed towns and floods swept lives away, and the pandemic continued. Not that I imagined that God was responsible for these events, but perhaps anger at God allowed me, however briefly, to ignore humankind's culpability in climate change, in acts of extreme racism, in ignoring the needs of poorer nations.

God is not easily pushed away, and while the path to God's presence that Jesus and James describe is not always an easy one, God does draw us nearer. As soon as I briefly returned to my office at Applewood United, a sort of symbolic return from sabbatical, I felt God's drawing me closer – as if God was always waiting just around the corner to welcome me home.

God will draw near to you – in worship, in your garden, on your patio or in your living room. God will draw near to you as you read a newspaper article about the opioid crisis and offer an earnest prayer for those who suffer and those who have died, or when you write a cheque to support the Alzheimer Society, or as you continue to wear a mask at the grocery store, or when you choose to reduce your use of non-renewable energy. In our choices to encourage and build a more just and compassionate world, we draw nearer to God, and God draws nearer to us.

God is close to us in the tired faces of Afghan refugees arriving in our communities, and in the brush of insect wings against the flowers in our pollinator gardens. God draws nearer to us in our own vulnerability, and especially when we serve others.

Ultimately, God's nearness can give us the courage to act, and the strength to value the vulnerable. It can encourage us and inspire us, fill us with peace and purpose. We are most complete when we are drawn into God's embrace, just as Jesus embraced the child. May we continue to draw closer to God as community and as individual children of the divine – and may we find God waiting for us. Amen