

## **ZOOM Worship for September 26, 2021 Celebrating the Season of Creation**

### **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: "Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary" MV 18**

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy tried and true;  
with thanksgiving, I'll be a living  
sanctuary for you.

### **Call to Worship and Opening Prayer**

One: Creation calls us to join in celebration and praise!

Two: *Eagles soaring, rivers rushing, insects buzzing, harvest ripening.*

One: We gather as we can, and give thanks and praise to God  
who is Author and Creator of all:

Two: *Sweeping prairies and snow tipped mountains, lush rain forests and  
hidden dessert life, mysterious ocean depths, and our own gardens.*

One: Creation calls us to lament and contemplation:

Two: *Climate change and destruction of habitats,  
shrinking glaciers and increasingly violent storms,  
oceans filled with plastic and lands contaminated.*

One: We all called not only to gather, but to worship God in word and action:

Two: *Reducing our dependence on non-renewable resources,  
eliminating our use of plastics,  
praying for the wisdom to live with respect in creation.*

One: And we do pray, God, that you open our senses to experience our natural world,  
seeing the first change of colour in the tree canopy as autumn arrives, feeling the temperatures  
drop in the evening, tasting the bounty of fresh vegetables, hearing the song of geese practicing  
their migration flight patterns. Deepen our understanding of the connection we have to all you  
have created, and help us to celebrate and honour creation's diversity, complexity, mystery and  
beauty.

Help us to learn from the raven, be taught by the river, receive blessing from  
the winds and wisdom from the trees. Remind us that Jesus knew of and taught  
from the example of the natural world around him.

Two: *Be with us as we worship today – still separately but connected  
by your Spirit and your love, still eager to follow and to serve,  
lifting our voices and our hearts as we pray, sing and praise together.*

**Opening Hymn: "It's a Song of Praise to the Maker" MV 30**

It's a song of praise to the Maker,  
the thrush sings high in the tree.  
It's a song of praise to the Maker,  
the gray whale sings in the sea,

and by the Spirit you and I can  
join our voice to the holy cry  
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

It's a call of life to the Giver  
when waves and waterfalls roar.  
It's a call of life to the Giver  
when high tides break on the shore,

and by the Spirit you and I can  
join our voice to the holy cry  
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

It's a hymn of love to the Lover;  
the bumblebees hum along.  
It's a hymn of love to the Lover;  
the summer breeze joins the song

and by the Spirit you and I can  
join our voice to the holy cry  
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

It's the chorus of all creation;  
it's sung by all living things.  
It's the chorus of all creation;  
a song the universe sings,

and by the Spirit you and I can  
join our voice to the holy cry  
and sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.

**Prayer for Orange Shirt Day**

Vibrant God

Your creation explodes with the colours of the rainbow

Your peoples reveal the beauty of diversity

We remember today when the joy and dignity of a precious child was destroyed.

We lament today for the childhoods lost through the residential school system.

We mourn for the spirits crushed and the futures compromised.

Celebrate the hope and joy of every child

Tell the stories of resistance that make us stronger

Build the bonds of solidarity to ensure “never again”

In the name of the one who was child among us

Amen

*From Kairos Canada by Vivian Ketchem. Vivian is a residential school survivor who attended Cecilia Jeffery Indian Residential School in the early 1970's. It was located in Kenora, Ontario. Vivian is best known as a writer and photographer who uses her skills to highlight social issues.*

**Sung Response: "Mother and God" VU 280**

Mother and God, to you we sing:

wide is your womb, warm is your wing.

In you we live, move and are fed

sweet, flowing milk, life giving bread.

Mother and God, to you we bring

all broken hearts, all broken wings.

**Scripture Readings:**

James 5:13-20 *The Message*

Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.

Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.

My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

Mark 9:38-50 *NRSV*

John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.' And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

**Choir: "Down to the River to Pray" (Arr. Sheldon Curry)**

**Reflection: "Giving to Get"**

**Hymn: "We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky" MV 143**

We cannot own the sunlit sky, the moon, the wildflow'rs growing.  
for we are part of all that is within life's river flowing.  
With open hands receive and share the gifts of God's creation,  
that all may have abundant life in ev'ry earthly nation.

When bodies shiver in the night and the weary, wait for morning,  
when children have no bread but tears, and warhorns sound their warning,  
god calls humanity to wake, to join in common labour,  
that all may have abundant life in oneness with their neighbour.

God calls humanity to join as partners in creating  
a future free from want or fear, life's goodness celebrating,  
that new world beckons from afar, invites our shared endeavour,  
that all may have abundant life and peace endure forever.

**Virtual Offering:**

One: We bring you our best, God –  
our best thoughts, our best intentions,  
our best thanks, our best contributions.

Two: *May all that we offer reflect your abundance, God.  
May what we share of our lives and our resources  
bring hope and healing, support and nurture  
to our faith community, and our world. Amen*

**Sung Response: "This Is God's Wondrous World" VU 296 Verse 1**

This is God's wondrous world,  
and to my listening ears  
all nature sings, and round me rings  
the music of the spheres.  
This is God's wondrous world;  
I rest me in the thought  
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,  
God's hand the wonders wrought.

**Prayers of the People:**

One: Creator God, you have called every part of creation "good,"  
and you have placed humanity in a position of responsibility  
in the fragile, intricate and beautiful web of all life.

Two: *We pray with thanks, God, for living and breathing beings –  
for spiders and snakes, for birds and bears, for all creatures  
that share our earth home on or in the earth and skies and waters.*

One: We pray our thanks, God, for everything that grows –  
for vegetables and fruits and grain, for weeds and trees and flowering plants.

Two: *We are creatures who are privileged to live in companionship with your creation,  
and we are aware that our own actions and decisions continue to impact our water and all that  
grows and lives there, our land and all that grows and lives upon it, and the very air we breathe.*

- One: We offer our prayers for the waters – oceans and rivers, ponds and streams,  
all the watery places so full of life.
- Two: *We offer our prayers for the land – mountains and fields, desserts and jungles,*
- One: We pray, God, for all those who make decisions about climate change,  
fossil fuel emissions, and all environmental concerns that they recognize the fragility of our  
planet, and our need and responsibility as human kind to care for all creation.
- Two: *We pray, compassionate God, for those most affected by what has transpired under our watch  
as stewards of creation: climate change, pollution of air and water, toxicity of soil, destruction of  
habitats like rain forests and wetlands.*
- One: We remember Indigenous communities still living with unsafe water,  
we pray for those whose homes and lives have been lost in fire and flood,  
we remember those who still live with the complications of poisoning from contaminated soil.
- Two: *Help us, God, to make decisions in our own households and community that reflect our respect  
for creation.*
- One: Loving and caring God, we bring our prayers for all those who are in physical or emotional pain  
today – whatever the reason. Help us to keep space for them in our prayers and in our hearts.
- Two: *We pray as one people from diverse experiences,  
joining our hearts and voices across virtual distance as we share  
words that Jesus taught 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 Music: "Called by Earth and Sky" MV 135**

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.  
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,  
called by earth and sky.

Precious these waters, endless seas,  
deep ocean's dream, waters of healing,  
rivers of rain, the wash of love again.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.  
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,  
called by earth and sky.

Precious this gift, the air we breathe;  
wind born and free. Breath of the Spirit,  
blow through this place, our gathering and our grace.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.  
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,  
called by earth and sky.

Precious these mountains, ancient sands;  
vast fragile land. Seeds of our waking,  
rooted and strong, Creation's faithful song.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.  
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,  
called by earth and sky.

Precious the fire that lights our way,  
bright dawning day. Fire of passion,  
sorrow undone, our faith and justice one.

Called by earth and sky, promise of hope held high.  
This is our sacred living trust, treasure of life sanctified,  
called by earth and sky, called by earth and sky,  
called by earth and sky.

### **Commissioning and Blessing**

As you go into the rest of your day, or week know that God, who sang the universe into being, goes with you, and that Jesus Christ, God's love song to the world, accompanies you, and that the Holy Spirit sings God's love into each and every heart, each and every day. Amen

**Benediction: "I see the Love of God in Every River"**

### **Reflection "Giving to Get"**

When Aron Ralston was 27 years old, while he was canyoneering alone in a remote area of Utah, he became trapped when a boulder dislodged and pinned his right hand. After days of contemplation, it became clear to Ralston that the only way he could live was to amputate the trapped portion of his arm. He survived the ordeal, and his story became a sensation. His own memoir of that time remains on best-seller lists in some countries, and the movie *127 Hours* that told his story was nominated for six Oscars. Perhaps you have heard of Ralston, or even seen the movie. It is a harrowing and gruesome tale that certainly captures our attention and interest – the story of a man that had to cut away a part of himself in order to live. I was reminded of Aron's story after reading the assigned gospel from Mark.

In that gospel reading for today, Jesus captures our attention and perhaps our interest as he uses language that is described by some of the scripture commentators I read as "gruesome" and "offensive" as he details the various ways we could cut off or tear out parts of ourselves in order to for us to live in

close relationship with God and in God's realm. We must give to get – sometimes giving up what we may think is necessary or vital in order for us to get life in full relationship to God, while allowing others who may think or worship differently to find their own path to faith and to the One God sent.

These images are violent and disturbing, and I would say often avoided by progressive preachers like me. Where is the Jesus from last week's Mark passage, drawing a child into his teaching circle? Where is the Jesus who uses the gentle imagery of mustard seeds, lilies, shepherds and farm labour to describe God's realm and God's way for us?

I believe that when we encounter Jesus' use of these vivid and disquieting directions in scripture, we are seeing the importance that our welcome and support for all those who are seeking God's way is for him, and should be for us. Jesus has just admonished the disciples for wanting to discount the good works done by another who is not part of their group. "Whoever is not against us is for us," Jesus says – and then reminds the disciples sharply that they have a responsibility to create a clear path for those who seek to know God in Christ. If they get in the way of those who seek, if their own actions or words create barriers for others, they risk separation from God that is like an unquenchable burning. They should, directs Jesus, examine their own lives and practices and eliminate whatever may stand in the way of encouraging and welcoming all who are searching for God – whatever the cost. Ultimately, Jesus tells them, they should be at peace with one another, and enhance their communities as precious and costly salt would enhance their lives and food.

In strong words and images, Jesus reminds the disciples – and us – that as followers of Jesus and children of God we are to be open and accepting, welcoming and supportive to all. To fail in that task, to remain a closed community where some are excluded or prevented from continuing on their path of faith and the abundant life God wants for all, can put us out of right relationship with God.

In this season of Creation, we celebrate that we are also in relationship with all that lives and breathes and grows and supports. Rocks, trees, creatures, water, air – all are part of the earth family, to be served and cared for by humankind, for they are part of "all my relations" as our United Church crest states. Perhaps, as we continue to ponder these scriptures, we could expand Jesus' term "these little ones" to include our siblings in creation. And as we do that, we could perhaps also ponder what needs to be removed or changed from our lives and our community in order to allow all people – and all our relations - to live and flourish?

I think we can become trapped in our own canyons of self-interest or self-importance when it comes to our care for the earth. Surely humanity is more important than animals, we think – so we continue to hunt for sport rather than sustenance and still use animals in experimentation. Surely our desire to travel easily and quickly is more important than clean air or the earth's resources, we seem to believe – so we continue using and burning fossil fuels. Surely our cravings for more things, for possessions, and the newest gadget or version is more important than maintaining habitats, protecting water sources, or combating the reality of climate change.

Could we cut off our dependence on fossil fuels to give life and health to our planet? Could we choose to drive less, take transit, or buy an electric car? Could we give up our vehicles?

Could we rip up our vacation plans so that we use less fuel to travel, or when we do travel choose eco-friendly hotels, locations or activities?

Could we chop off complacency and demand to know where our grocery stores source their produce, and not buy unless it is local and in season, giving up strawberries in January?

Could we cut out ignoring that every day we make decisions that affect the health of all people – all creation, from the soaps we choose and use to wash our hands, to the amount of single-use plastic we purchase and throw away.

What attitudes, what habits, what practices, what choices must we give up – as essential as they may seem – in order to secure a flourishing and thriving future for all the relations who follow us, and the many who also follow Jesus?

Like Aron Ralston, we must each decide what we can live without so that we may truly and completely live. Live with respect in creation, live in full and right relationship with God and one another. It will not always be an easy decision – perhaps it will even be painful or messy or uncomfortable. Ultimately, we may find peace with one another; we may find that our lives are enhanced in ways we had not anticipated.

We can give to get – give up what causes us and others to be thrown from the path of God's love - get a healthier planet, a thriving creation, a community of faith that includes all and works for justice for all.

May it be so.