



LAKE OF BAYS PASTORAL CHARGE

Pioneer, Hillside – 10:30am.

**Sunday Worship on May 5, 2024
Sixth Sunday of Easter**

Minister: Rev Meg Jordan (705-789-6600) jordanm@vianet.ca

lakeofbayspastoralcharge196@gmail.com

Bookkeeper/Administrator: Linda Pinkerton

Leadership Chair: Jennifer Parker

Musician, Knox: Cynthia MacLean

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WE GATHER

Welcome

Family Life and Work and Celebrations

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Acknowledgement of the Land

Call to Worship:

God has given us this beautiful earth,
all that grows and all that lives upon it.

Thanks be to God.

God has given us breath to live and spirit to sing.

Thanks be to God.

God has gathered us into a community of care and worship.
Let us worship God with love, thanksgiving, and praise.

Opening Hymn: God of the Bible MV#28

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

Refrain:

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.

2 God in our struggles,
God in our hunger,
suffering with us,
taking our part,
still you empow'r us,
mothering Spirit,
feeding, sustaining,
from your own heart. [Refrain]

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

4 Not by your finger,
not by your anger

will our world order
change in a day,
but by your people,
fearless and faithful,
small paper lanterns,
lighting the way. [Refrain]

5 Hope we must carry,
shining and certain
through all our turmoil,
terror and loss,
bonding us gladly
one to the other,
till our world changes,
facing the cross. [Refrain]

Prayer of Approach (unison)

**Come Holy Spirit,
Enliven us this day.
Come into each heart, each prayer,
each song, each life,
so that we may live and love
with purpose,
with courage,
and with enthusiasm.
Amen**

The Aramaic Lord's Prayer-recited by Rev Meg

WE LISTEN

Scripture Reading: Acts 10:44-48

Leader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church
Response: Thanks be to God.

Hymn: Spirit Open My Heart MV#79

Chorus:

Spirit open my heart
To the joy and pain of living
As you love may I love

In receiving and in giving Spirit,
open my heart

1 God, replace my stony heart
with a heart that's kind and tender.
All my coldness and fear
to your grace I now surrender.

2 Write your love upon my heart
as my law, my goal, my story.
In each thought, word, and deed,
may my living bring you glory.

3 May I weep with those who weep,
share the joy of sister, brother.
In the welcome of Christ,
may we welcome one another.

Sermon: It all started with a dream

When we read Acts 10-15, we enter one of the crucial sections of the New Testament, crucial for the early church and equally crucial for our own time. What we are experiencing in these chapters is nothing less than a redefinition of an ancient religion. Or perhaps one can more accurately say a rediscovery of the central core of that ancient religion.

All religions, to a greater or lesser extent, struggle with a very basic question: how does what we know as truth change. Can it change? These are enormous and wrenching questions for adherents of all religions, and they are precisely the questions that Luke in the Book of the Acts is wrestling with.

We modern believers would do well to take with the greatest seriousness what the writer Luke is offering to us here, because if we really listen to what is going on here— we are being presented a key with which we might begin to unlock many of the conundrums we face in the world today. The story of the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius is at the heart of Luke's sermon. In chapter 10, Peter witnesses the gift of the Holy Spirit falling on Gentile believers, especially Cornelius. And he, in considerable astonishment, announces. "In truth, I am grasping that God is no respecter of appearances (usual translation "persons"). Rather, in every nation, the one who fears (worships, obeys) God and acts righteously is acceptable to God" (Acts 10 :34-35).

Peter, a faithful Jew and follower of Jesus, has just realized and proclaimed that one of the hallmarks of his Jewish existence has now crumbled before his very eyes. "God is no respecter of appearances." But Jews and Christians have surely been such, and so has every other religious believer who has been taught that God considers some people as anathema or "abomination."

One can hardly overemphasize the radical, earth-shaking claim that Peter's announcement represents. If God's spirit is as available to Gentiles as it has been to Jews, the world is a vastly different place than they had believed it to be. And if any reader might have missed this astonishing announcement, Luke gives them another shot at it in Acts chapter 11. Rather than a clumsy repetition of the previous chapter, chapter 11 reemphasizes, reenergizes, and refocuses the claim still again. Peter here retells "the defenders of the faith" in Jerusalem what had happened to him in Joppa and Caesarea, in short, the story of chapter 10. The righteous religious defenders of the faith in Jerusalem are those who insist that full entrance into the new messianic community of Jesus Messiah was confined to those who follow the ancient practices of Judaism. After all, Jesus was a circumcised Jew and the beloved community based upon his teachings was to be a return to the heart of what it meant to be a Jew. They are horrified that Peter has "gone in with people who were uncircumcised and ate with them" (11: 3).

Table fellowship is crucial in Judaism, a religious tradition that grew up in a broader Middle Eastern culture where the choice of table sharing was a vital indicator of who was in the clan and who was not. Indeed, it could be said that one of the major reasons that Jesus was murdered by the religious authorities of his own religious tradition is his unsavory choice of table companions; he ate with too many sinners for their tastes, thereby making himself unclean in the eyes of those who determine such things.

So, to put an end to that sort of thinking, Peter is given a dream by God wherein all sorts of creepy, crawly critters are observed wriggling around on a giant sheet, falling out of the sky. There were in this menagerie "four-footed creatures of the earth, wild beasts, serpents, and birds of the sky" (11:6). The clear implication is that many of these beasts were unclean in Judaism. Thus, when a voice loudly demands, "Get up, Peter! Kill and eat," Peter the Jew is plainly shocked and piously proclaims, "Not at all, Lord (the implication of the phrase is "Heaven forbid" or more colloquially "You have got to be kidding!"). The common or the unclean has never entered my mouth" (11:8). Peter the Jew has given the answer that his tradition has called him to give; I know what is common and unclean, and I avoid such things like the plague they are. But the voice will have none of it. "Things God has created and cleansed, stop making common!"

After the vision departs, Peter is summoned from Joppa to Caesarea to go see Cornelius. All of this we have already experienced in the last chapter, but Peter adds the note to his retelling that "six of these brothers also went with me" (11:12). That is, six members of the defenders of the faith witnessed all that Peter saw in that house, most particularly when the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and the rest of the Gentiles. In other words, Peter is saying, you finally cannot discount the witness of some of your own people.

Peter wraps up his defense of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the community with his memorable words of 11:17. "If therefore God gave them the same gift (that is the Holy Spirit—cf. chapter 2) as to us who had believed in the Lord Jesus Messiah, "who was I to prevent God?")? God clearly has in mind a reordering of the world as we know it.

In a nutshell, here is the issue of chapter 11: How can meals be holy yet shared with people we have been taught are unclean? And the answer is: The people you have thought to be unclean are not unclean—simple as that. So God says. The issue will not be laid completely to rest until the Jerusalem council meeting of chapter 15, but the fact is the issue has begun its settling the minute Peter walks into Cornelius' house, because Peter with his own eyes has witnessed the reality that "God has given repentance to life (or perhaps "conversion that leads to life") even to the Gentiles" (11:18). The Holy Spirit is still doing its work of giving life, and the God—whom Jesus teaches is Spirit, is no "respector of appearances."

So, back to the present day. Whenever we exclude anyone on the basis of "appearance," or "externals" i.e. persons different in any way from us, we give the lie to this truth. And when we decide that our way is the only way, we laugh in the face of the Holy Spirit who is forever blowing its own way, reordering our disordered world. Who are we to prevent God? Who are we to despise what God has created and what God loves? It was a troubling question for the early church. It remains a troubling question for us. May we at Lake. Of Bays Pastoral Charge be open to the leading of the Spirit in our day. May we find a way to love as God loves.

WE RESPOND

Call for Offering

Offertory Hymn "We Give You But Your Own" VU# 542

**We give you but your own,
whate'er the gift may be;
all that we have is yours alone,
we give it gratefully.**

Prayers of the People's Longing

O God We Call VU #411

Closing Hymn: Like a Healing Stream MV#144

1. Like a healing stream in a barren desert, Spirit water bringing life to dusty earth, God is trickling through our lives as in a dream unfolding, promising revival and rebirth... like a healing stream.

2. Like a gentle rain on a thirsty garden, Spirit water come to nourish tiny seed, God is bubbling through the soil to coax a new creation, yearning for an end to want and need... like a gentle rain.

3. Like a river strong with a restless current, Spirit water rushing on to distant shore, God is carving out a channel in a new direction, calling for an end to hate and war... like a river strong.

4. Like a mighty sea reaching far horizons, Spirit water with a love both deep and wide, God is working in our hearts to shape a new tomorrow: God will always challenge and provide!

Like a mighty sea, like a river strong, like a gentle rain, like a healing stream.

Commissioning and Benediction:

Go in Peace and as you go,
And may the care of God enfold you,
the passion of the Risen Christ embolden you,
and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit empower you,
now and always,
Go in Peace,
Amen

For your CALENDAR

May 5 **TODAY. Last shared service at Pioneer.
Hike for Hospice and Red Dress day**

May 8, 11, 15, 18 @ 2 p.m. May 9, 10, 16, 17 @ 7p.m.
OLD LOVE by Norm Foster

May 12 **Mother's Day. LOB circuit is back!!
Knox United: Dorset 9 a.m.
Stewart Memorial: Dwight 10:15 a.m.
Pioneer Memorial: Hillside 11:30 am.**

May 19 **The Pentecost Spirit as fulfilment of Easter**

May 26 **Trinity Sunday—The Mystery we call God**

June 2-June 30 **Rev Meg's holiday— holy time for rest
Schedule of Guest ministers TBA**

July 7th **Summer Sermon Series: Earth Connections
"What a Wildly Wonderful World"
Psalm 104, The Message**

August 12-19. **CAMP AWESOME WEEK: Bees for Peace Spread the word.**

Ongoing Stewardship Options:

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2. Via PAR (preauthorized remittance). Money is withdrawn monthly from your bank account.

3. By e-transfer. The email address for donations via e-transfer is

lobunitedchurches@gmail.com In the subject line/comment please identify to which of the Churches you wish to donate, Pioneer in Hillside, Stewart in Dwight or Knox in Dorset.

4. By cheque: If you send a cheque, please make it out to Lake of Bays Pastoral Charge and mail it to: LOB United Churches, P.O. Box 196, Dwight, ON, P0A 1H0, specifying for which church the donation is intended. Thank you.