

Sunday,, January 21, 2024

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WE GATHER

Welcome

Family Life and Work

Acknowledgement of the Land

As we begin our worship here in Lake Bays Township we acknowledge the ancient indigenous history and heritage of the land upon which we live and work. We acknowledge the many original people of this land with all their different languages and cultures, we acknowledge the First Nations, the Metis people and the Inuit people. We give thanks for their care for the land and the waters. We are grateful for their teachings which are much needed in our times, about how to honour our spiritual connections with the earth by living with respect in creation.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Introit: **Behold, behold, I make all things new MV #115**

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

Call to Worship: (responsive)

Welcome to this holy time which we create together through the celebration of God's presence
We are called to live with respect in Creation
And—proclaim the meaning of Jesus' life and death
We are of the earth and one with all life
Let us breathe deeply as we open our minds and hearts to God.

Opening Hymn: We Are Pilgrims VU#595

- 1 We are pilgrims on a journey,
fellow travellers on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

- 2 Sister, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you;

pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

- 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.
- 4 I will weep when you are weeping,
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.
- 5 When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.
- 6 Brother, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Prayer of Approach (unison)

Gracious and loving God,
we gather this morning,
opening to your healing power.
We do not understand all the things that make us whole,
nor the mystery of all that cripples us in body, mind, and spirit.
But we trust that you are with us—
a hidden wholeness coursing
through our lives and our world.
We come this morning,
seeking to open ourselves
to the sacred flow of your wholeness in our lives.
Amen

WE LISTEN

Readings: Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; Mark 1: 14-20

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is Saying to the church

Response: Thanks be to God.

Hymn: Will you come and follow me VU#567

- 1 Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

- 2 Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

- 3 Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

- 4 Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside

and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

5 Christ, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Sermon/reflection: Come one, come all!

(The following is a sermon by Amy-Starr Redwine upon which I will base my comments.)

Many of us are familiar with the story we often call “Jonah and the Whale.” In this story, a prophet named Jonah receives direction from the Lord, To go to a city called Nineveh and preach to the people there, To call them to account for their sinful behavior.

But instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah runs away – he gets on a boat heading in the opposite direction. It turns out escaping God’s call is not so easy, and, as the story goes, Jonah ends up swallowed by a big fish.

Basically, he experiences a divine *time out*, and, amazingly enough, it works.

After three days, Jonah **repents and prays** and the fish vomits him onto dry land.

This time, Jonah does what God says.

He stomps his way across Nineveh
preaching the shortest sermon ever, and

what’s really shocking is that it’s one of the most effective sermons ever!

The people of Nineveh **repent** – they turn away from their sinful ways.

God has mercy on them and decides **not to destroy the city after all**. All’s well that ends well, right?

Except, **that’s not the end of the story**.

Because even though we usually turn Jonah’s story into a cautionary tale about trying to run away from God’s call,

what happens at the end suggests that this story has another important lesson to teach us.

Listen to these verses from the last chapter in Jonah's story:

Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.' Then the Lord said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

Jonah was a Hebrew, one of God's chosen people.

And if God chose Jonah to be a prophet, presumably it was because Jonah had shown himself to be faithful, earnest in his desire to follow God's ways.

But Jonah's faithfulness has its limits, and Jonah discovers what those limits are when

God tells him to **go to the city of Nineveh**

and tell the people there of God's love and mercy.

Jonah doesn't want to go.

And it turns out there is a good reason Jonah doesn't want

To go and preach to the people of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the ruthless Assyrian empire, an empire that had terrorized the Israelites. The people of Nineveh were the Israelites' sworn enemies,

so it's no wonder Jonah balked when God told him to go and preach to them about God's love and mercy –

for, as Jonah knows, God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger,

and abounding in steadfast love, ready to relent from punishing...

and Jonah isn't so sure he wants to see Nineveh on the receiving end of God's grace.

What happens to Jonah at the end of his book, when the plant giving him shade withers

and he feels the effects of the sun and hot wind,

is a **perfect example of someone fighting against the current**

of God's mercy and grace. Jonah is convinced that the Ninevites should never be on the receiving end of God's mercy, and he is equally convinced that he deserves whatever blessings God offers him. He is caught in this cycle of judgment and condemnation,

struggling to extend to his enemies the same grace God has offered to him.

It's a pattern of judgment we all get caught in:

we judge ourselves worthy or unworthy in spite of evidence to the contrary.

We judge others too, by their appearance, their achievements or lack thereof, failing to see the many, many factors that contribute

to their success or failure. We become trapped in a cycle of judgment,

unable to extend compassion, empathy, or love.

There is a story in the gospel of John. Jesus is teaching in the temple

When a group of religious leaders bring a disgraced woman before Jesus to test his knowledge of the law and his willingness to enforce it.

These men are buoyed up by the currents of culture and privilege. After all, if the woman was indeed caught in the act of adultery, as they claim,

then somewhere there was also a man caught in the act as well!

But Jesus refuses to get drawn into a discussion about law, and he refuses to condemn the woman.

Here and throughout his ministry, Jesus keeps trying to teach us

the same thing God tried to teach Jonah: **God is not transactional.**

God is not obsessed with right and wrong,

guilt and punishment, success and rewards. God is obsessed with loving us **just as we are.**

because *God is relentlessly relational.*

Time and again, particularly with those on the margins

who have spent their whole lives fighting invisible currents of prejudice, Jesus **sets aside judgment**

and shows us *what it looks like to choose compassion.*

When Jonah finally goes to Nineveh after his time in the belly of the whale, he simply walks a straight line through the city,

preaches his seven-word sermon, and leaves.

He does not stop to learn anything about who the Ninevites are,

He interacts not at all with the people who live there,
and as a result, he has no capacity to imagine their lives
or empathize with their challenges.

That is *not* service.

That is *not* relationship.

Jonah remains **trapped in ignorance and judgment.**

He finds it almost impossible to follow a relentlessly relational God,
to feel and show compassion for those he despised.

In a letter to Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton wrote,

“Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.

That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody’s business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy if anything can.”

God is calling us to Nineveh, to that place and that people we cannot imagine are worthy of God’s love or our time.

God calls us to love others with the kind of love that does not stop to ask whether they are deserving of it.

We can run from that call or outright refuse it,

but imagine what might happen if we dared to accept it.

Amen.

WE RESPOND

Offertory Hymn “Grant Us, God, the Grace of Giving” VU#540

Grant us, God, the grace of giving,
with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully.

Offertory/Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People :The Lord’s Prayer (paraphrase) VU #916

Eternal Spirit,

Earth-maker, Pain Bearer, Life-Giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be.

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Like a Healing Stream MV#144.

**“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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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

We go from this time of worship
With a daring and courageous love.
For the world is waiting for your special gift
And as you go may you know the blessing God
deep in your hearts
now and always Amen

Choral Benediction: May the God of Hope Go With Us VU#424

- 1 May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
bringing light and hope to every land and race.
Praying, let us work for peace,
singing, share our joy with all,
working for a world that's new,
faithful when we hear Christ's call.

- 2 May the God of healing free the earth from fear,
freeing us for peace, both treasured and pursued.
May the God of love keep our commitment clear
to a world restored, to human life renewed. R

Calendar of upcoming Events

TODAY
Jan 17

Epiphany 2 Worship Team Meeting after lunch
Coffee & Conversation ZOOM 10.am-11am
M&P luncheon meeting to evaluate Rev Meg's
Leadership Team Meeting 1-3 pm,

first year

Jan 18	Community Healing Prayer Ministry 6:30 to 8	p.m.Pre-registra-
	tion cathyferrenrh@gmail.com .	
Jan 21	Epiphany 3 Worship LOB Congregational Mtg	
Jan 25	Monthly Circle Dance 6:30 - 8 p.m.	
Jan 28	Epiphany 4 Worship	
Feb 4	Epiphany 5 Worship	
Feb 11	Transfiguration Sunday-Communion	
Feb 13	Shrove Tuesday Pancake Luncheon 11:30 am	1:30 p.m. LENTEN
	STUDY BOOK AVAILABLE	FOR PURCHASE.
Feb 14	ASH WEDNESDAY beginning of Lent .	
Feb 25	First Sunday in Lent.	

Ongoing Stewardship: There are several different options for you to gift your offering to Lake of Bays Pastoral Charge.

1. In person and on the plate. (Each congregation has a different practice around this but you can't miss it!)
2. Via PAR (preauthorized remittance). Then you don't have to think about it again. Money is withdrawn monthly
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



“Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.”

LAKE OF BAYS PASTORAL CHARGE

Faith communities of
 Pioneer Memorial in Hillside,
 Stewart Memorial in Dwight
 Knox United in Dorset.

Shared Winter services in Pioneer Hall, 10:30 a.m.

**January 14, 2024
2nd Sunday after Epiphany**

Minister: Rev Meg Jordan (705-789-6600) jordanm@vianet.ca
lakeofbayspastoralcharge196@gmail.com
Bookkeeper/Administrator: Linda Pinkerton
Charge Leadership Chair: Jennifer Parker
Website Volunteer: Karen Markham
Musician, Knox: Cynthia MacLean