



LAKE OF BAYS PASTORAL CHARGE
Pioneer, Hillside – 9:00 a.m.
Stewart Memorial, Dwight – 10:15 a.m.
Knox, Dorset – 11:30 a.m.

Sunday Worship, July 16, 2023

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WE GATHER

**Welcome, Life and Work of the Church
Lighting of the Christ Candle**

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 indigenous 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, much needed in our times, about how to honour our spiritual connections with the earth by living with respect in creation.

Call to Worship:

People of God, come with a spirit of joy!

We come to worship God

People of God, come with a spirit open to mystery!

We come, filled with awe and wonder

People of God, come with humility and simplicity!

We come deeply aware

that we long to be. filled with God;

Transformed by God. Amen

Hymn: Called by Earth and Sky MV# 135

Refrain:

**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**

**1. Precious these waters endless seas,
deep ocean's dream
Waters of healing, rivers of rain
The wash of love again R.**

**2. Precious this gift the air we breathe,
wind born and free
Breath of the Spirit blown through this place
Our gathering and our grace R.**

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

**4. Precious the fire that lights the way,
bright dawning day
Fire of passion sorrows undone
Our faith and justice one R.**

Opening Prayer (unison)

Empowering God,
We breathe in your breath,
and seek to think with your mind,
And feel with your heart
so we may evermore live in your way.
Meet with us here, we pray.
Give to us the inspiration,
the wisdom, and the will
to do your work in the world.. Amen.

Silent Prayer of confession led by Singing Bowl

Assurance of Pardon

We are loved. We are forgiven.
Let us open ourselves to receiving that love and that forgiveness.

Action song: Standing like a tree

WE LISTEN

Scripture reading: Matthew's Parable of the Sower

Gradual Hymn: Soil of God You and I MV#174

*Soil of God, you and I, stand ready to bear
Seeds of faith nourished by God's tender care.
Growing in everyone for here God is found.
All stand together, we are...
Holy ground.*

*Soil of God, you and I, now ready to be
Part of God's promise, for others to see.
Open to everyone for here God is found.
All stand together, we are...
Holy ground.*

*Soil of God, you and I, now called to rebirth,
Joining as partners with all of the earth.
Living in harmony for here God is found.
All stand together, this is...
Holy ground."*

Sermon: Holy Ground—The Earth and Us

Christianity is in a time of intense transitions in the landscape of Western Theology. We need to explore ways of telling the ancient good news of God's love in stories and ceremonies that can provide robust spiritual nurture for post-modern children along with their parents and grandparents. We need an image of divinity that allows us to describe a divine presence working intimately within the smallest particle and wave of each fleeting moment as well as grandly in the magnificence of our rapidly expanding universe.

Like the Apostle Paul who, because of his experience of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus went into the wilderness of Arabia for three years to undergo a revision of his entire world view, **we citizens of a planet in peril need a fundamental transformation of the images that underlie the stories we tell** about God and the meaning and purpose of life.

I have worked in the field of Christian education in the United Church of Canada and other denominations for over 30 years. I was co-editor and writer with the lectionary based Whole People of God curriculum for over ten years as well as the multi-age editor for the arts based curriculum called Seasons of the Spirit.

Over the years, perhaps because of all this intense work with scripture, something began to happen to my operative image of God. I guess you could say I went through a dark night of the soul. One day, during my devotional time, I realized that I no longer believed in a God out there—neither mother or father—and most upsetting of all—I

realized that I didn't know anymore how to pray. It was an excruciating recognition of loss. I felt bereft. Luckily I was alone in the house, so that I could allow myself to weep and wail and lament as much as I needed to. Which I did. Then, when my grief was spent and I was leaning against a wall to catch my breath—I became aware of a warm presence all around me like a big hug and words began to form in a place of listening deep inside and all around me—and I heard “Yes Meg, your image of me has changed. But I am still here as I have always been.”

This was my Damascus experience. Something inside me has changed forever. I have a new awareness of God's presence that is beyond all names and images yet flowing and working through them all. I know now that Here, before everything, was divine presence. And now I can say:

Here, in this moment,
Here in this place,
Here in this gathering of persons...
here, from the very beginning,
as the beginning is God's presence
God's Wisdom.

Most people have no idea that there is a strong and profound witness to this divine feminine presence called “Wisdom” buried deep within the Judeo-Christian Biblical heritage! We find it in the Psalms, in the Book of Job, in Proverbs, in the inter-testamental text Wisdom of Solomon, in the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John. **This long forgotten biblical image known variously as Hokhmah/Sophia/Wisdom provides some good fertile soil for a creative process of re-imagination that is desperately needed by Christian storytellers.**

Hear what scripture says:

“Wisdom is more mobile than any motion;
... she pervades and penetrates all things.

²⁵ ...she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;

²⁶ ...she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of God's goodness.

²⁷ Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;

Long ago, this moving and flowing feminine image was at the heart of what enabled strict monotheistic Jews such as the Paul and John to make sense of their experiences of the living God within the person of Jesus Christ. In the same way, I believe She can

help Christians in the 21st century to make sense of what we are discovering through science about our universe so that we can tell stories of God in such a way that they can be heard by 21st century children.

The wonderful thing about Christian tradition is its many stories. It is just that some have been overlooked or ignored in favor of more dominant stories...there is, for example,

a dominant story about Jesus as connector to an elsewhere deity;

there is an even better story about Jesus as the revealer of God-with-us in all our everyday living and loving...

There is a dominant story about prayer reaching out to a listening God who might intervene on our behalf;

there is a better story about prayer raising the mind and heart in awareness of a Divine Presence always with us and empowering us.—transforming us.

There is a dominant story about Christianity as a unique pathway to God; there is a far more truthful story about Jesus revealing the sacred presence that is with all people in their everyday lives.

There are two very powerful ideas that are coming into fullness in our times and which all Christian storytellers need to take into consideration.

a) The **indigenous spirituality** of every human being through a close connection with the earth and our bodies. This is an ancient wisdom that is being rediscovered through the generous sharing of indigenous peoples around the planet. I believe this is at the heart of Jesus' own spirituality as a person indigenous to the Middle East. An awareness of the innate, indigenous connection to each person to the earth can provide fertile ground for interfaith dialogue and multipath celebration. At the very least it can provide a powerful incentive for churches to include ministry with all the children in the neighbourhood not just their own members.

b) The **story of the evolution of the Universe and the creative role of humans within it** is something which we share with all citizens of the earth and in which we participate as co-creators of the future of our planet. Reclaiming the sacred nature of the cosmos — and of Planet Earth in particular — is one of the outstanding spiritual challenges of our time. Therefore, we must let all our storytelling about God be filled with the wonder and awe of being immersed in the “Deep Time” story of an ancient, evolving universe and of the very recent human participation in it as intelligent, creative, meaning making beings.

The United Church of Canada could have a very important role to play within the future development of the practice of Christian story telling on Planet Earth. **The New Creed**

and all the work that went into rewriting it to include women and the earth provides a wonderful precedent for the kind of re-imagining and reframing that must become a part of our daily Christian practice.

A Song of Faith provides a powerful witness to a Christianity that can accept differences, tolerate inconsistencies and thrive on paradox. A Song of Faith creates space for new expressions of faith while at the same time it affirms the ongoing validity of some of the ways of our ancestors. It provides a wonderful example of the evolutionary principle of “include and transcend”.

Last but not least, there is much that we can build upon through all the hard work, which was only just begun through the **United Church Apology** to the Indigenous Peoples of this land. We affirmed the dignity and wisdom of a pre-Christian spiritual tradition similar to the way the early Celts received Christianity. Like early Celtic Christianity, I believe we have been preparing holy ground for the development of genuine multi-faith celebrations that will be inclusive, earth-based, earth-loving and Spirit-filled. We will begin to tell stories and develop spiritual practices that are grounded in love for planet earth and our earth companions. We are discovering God as the flow of life deep within all being. We are in the midst of a great reawakening to the sacredness of the earth and the human soul.

As Eriugena, one of the great early Celtic scholars said—“We are made from God.” In our united Church Song of Faith we put it this way—God is “the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.”

It is a Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.
May it be the ground out of which all our actions grow.

WE RESPOND

OFFERING INVITATION:

DOXOLOGY 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.

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Inspiring God, thank you for your diverse world of mountains and rivers, oceans and deserts, wild animals and birds and thank you for breathing into us the breath of life.

We recognize that our world is hurting in so many ways through greed, lack of balance, and the hardened hearts and violent actions of fellow human beings. We pray for those who

mourn, for those who are sick, for those who are hungry, for those who have lost their way. We pray for our beloved planet earth and all in our world who work for her healing. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray:

PARAPHRASE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER VU# 916

CLOSING HYMN: Teach Me God to Wonder VU#299

- 1 Teach me, God, to wonder, teach me, God, to see;
let your world of beauty capture me.
Praise to you be given, love for you be lived,
life be celebrated, joy you give.

- 2 Let me, God, be open, let me loving be;
let your world of people speak to me. R

- 3 Let me, God, be ready, let me be awake,
in your world of loving my place take. R

- 4 Teach me, God, to know you, hear you when you speak,
see you in my neighbour when we meet. R

COMMISSIONING and BLESSING

ANNOUNCEMENTS For your calendars:

WELCOME TO SUMMER CHURCH IN MUSKOKA

- July 22: Celebration of Life: Paul Hutcheson
- July 23: Celebrating Diversity: Muskoka Pride Week
- July 30 Joint Communion 10:30 a.m. at Seabreeze Church
- August 6 Rooted in the Earth
- Aug 10 Celebration of Life: Stephanie Rabjohn
- August 8-11 CAMP AWESOME: Bees for Peace

PLEASE NOTE: the Return of CAMP AWESOME's new program celebrating God's wildly wonderful world (Psalm 104) BEES FOR PEACE. August 8-11, 9 am to 12 pm

Kids and youth (Ages 5 - 12) are welcome to join our 4-day summer camp where we will be learning about native bees, honey bees and native plant gardens and how they relate to our faith! In this camp, we will have lots of fun games and activities to help enhance the learning experience. This 4-day camp will help build community among the youth of the church and strengthen their connection to the Bible and nature. By the end of the camp, kids and youth will get a wonderful experience and gain knowledge about the hidden community that we live with: pollinators.

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, specifying for which church the donation is intended. Thank you.**