



**LAKE OF BAYS PASTORAL CHARGE**

Pioneer, Hillside – 10:30 a.m.

**Sunday Worship, February 25, 2024**  
**First Sunday in Lent**

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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 worship and work. We acknowledge the many original indigenous people of this land with all their different languages and cultures — the First Nations people, the Metis people and the Inuit people. We are aware of the terrible inhumanity and injustice with which our ancestors treated indigenous people in the past and we are deeply sorry for the way these injustices continue today. In Black History Month we also acknowledge those whose ancestors were indigenous to the continent of Africa and came here under the violent system of slavery and white supremacy. As followers of Jesus Christ, with deep humility, we seek healing and work towards right relations among all those who live in this land.

### **INTROIT: O God We Call VU#411**

**O God we call**

**O God we call**

**From deep inside we yearn**

**From deep inside we yearn**

**From deep inside we yearn for you.**

### **Call to Worship:**

We have begun the Lenten journey.

**Lent's questions confront us.**

Where will the road take us?

**What kind of people will we be?**

Will we have the courage to withstand temptation?

**Will we trust in God's faithfulness?**

The quest will test us and try us.

**We come trusting that Jesus is with us on the Way.**

## **Opening Hymn.: Come in, come in and sit down VU#395**

R: Come in, come in and sit down,  
you are a part of the family.  
We are lost and we are found,  
and we are a part of the family.

1 You know the reason why you came,  
yet no reason can explain;  
so share in the laughter and cry in the pain,  
for we are a part of the family. R

2 God is with us in this place,  
like a mother's warm embrace.  
We're all forgiven by God's grace,  
for we are a part of the family. R

3 There's life to be shared in the bread and the wine;  
we are the branches, Christ is the vine.  
This is God's temple, it's not yours or mine,  
but we are a part of the family. R

4 There's rest for the weary and health for us all;  
there's a yoke that is easy, and a burden that's small.  
So come in and worship and answer the call,  
for we are a part of the family. R

## **Prayer of Approach (unison)**

May we shape a space in our lives to meet you, O God,  
a space that is full of awe and wonder,  
a space that protects aliveness and opens up justice,  
a space that creates peace on earth,  
and binds us together as community.

May we become seekers of aliveness  
travellers on the journey of promise  
full of expectant hope  
that with the going will come good.  
May we travel with you  
to find you, O God. Amen.

## **Paraphrase of the Prayer of Jesus 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 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.**

## **WE LISTEN and RESPOND**

**Scripture reading:** Selections of Abraham and Sarah Stories from  
the book of Genesis

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

Response: Thanks be to God

**Hymn for Reflection: O God of Every Nation VU#677**

O God of every nation,  
of every race and land,  
redeem the whole creation  
with your almighty hand.  
Where hate and fear divide us  
and bitter threats are hurled,  
in love and mercy guide us,  
and heal our strife-torn world.

From search for wealth and power  
and scorn of truth and right,  
from trust in bombs that shower  
destruction through the night,  
from pride of race and station  
and blindness to your way,  
deliver every nation,  
eternal God, we pray!

Lord, strengthen all who labor  
that we may find release  
from fear of rattling saber,  
from dread of war's increase.  
When hope and courage falter,  
Lord, let your voice be heard;  
with faith that none can alter,  
your servants undergird.

Keep bright in us the vision  
of days when war shall cease,  
when hatred and division  
give way to love and peace,  
till dawns the morning glorious  
when truth and justice reign,  
and Christ shall rule victorious  
o'er all the world's domain.

## Sermon: **Blessed to be a Blessing**

**A sermon by Rev Meg for the second Sunday in Lent  
Based on the Genesis stories of Abraham and Sarah  
And the book “Seeking Aliveness” by Brian McLaren  
Genesis 12:1–9, 15: 1-12, 17-18**

Apparently, according to the ancient stories of Genesis, God is up to something surprising and amazing in our world. While many are busy plotting our own success, God is working all things together for good. Yes, sometimes we humans try to rope God into our ambitions and use God to help us scramble to the top of the pyramid. Yes, we sometimes even try to enlist God to condemn those we want to condemn, deprive those we want to deprive, even kill those we want to get rid of. But God isn't willing to be domesticated into our little tribal plans. While we figure out ways to use God to get blessings for ourselves, God stays focused on the big picture of blessing the world—which includes blessing us in the process.

We see this pattern unfold when God chooses a man named Abram and a woman named Sara. They are from a prominent family in a great ancient city-state known as Ur, one of the first ancient Middle Eastern civilizations. Like all civilizations, Ur has a dirty little secret: its affluence is built on violence, oppression, and exploitation. Behind its beautiful facade, its upper classes live each day in luxury, while its masses slave away in squalor. God tells this couple to leave their life of privilege in this great civilization. He sends them out into the unknown as wanderers and adventurers. No longer will Abram and Sara have the armies and wealth and comforts of Ur at their disposal. All they will have is a promise—that God will be with them and show them a better way. From now on, they will make a new road by walking. God's promise comes in two parts. In the first part, Abram and Sara will be blessed. They will become a great nation, and God will bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them. That's the kind of promise we might expect. It's the second part that's surprising. Not only will they be blessed, but they will be a blessing. Not only will their family become a great nation, but all the families on Earth will be blessed through them. This is a unique identity indeed. It means the children of Abram and Sara will be a unique “us” in relation to all the other them of the world. Their identity will not be us at the top of the pyramid and them at the bottom, or vice versa. Nor will their identity be us assimilated into them, or us assimilating

them into us. Nor will it be us against them, us apart from them, or us in spite of them. No, Abram and Sara's unique identity will be us for them, us with them, us for the benefit and blessing of all. That "otherly" identity—us for the common good—wasn't intended only for Abram and Sara's clan. It is the kind of identity that is best for every individual, every culture, every nation, every religion. It says, "We're special!" But it also says, "They're special, too." It says, "God has a place for us and a plan for us." But it also says, "God has a place and plan for others, too." When we drift from that high calling and start thinking only of me, only of our clan or our nation or our religion, our sense of identity begins to go stale and sour, even toxic.

The story of Abram and Sara's unique identity tells us something powerful about God's identity, too: God is not the tribal deity of one group of "chosen" people. God is not for us and against all others. God is for us and for them, too. God loves everyone everywhere, no exceptions.

And this story also tells us something about true faith. Faith is stepping off the map of what's known and making a new road by walking into the unknown. It's responding to God's call to adventure, stepping out on a quest for goodness, trusting that the status quo isn't as good as it gets, believing a promise that a better life is possible. True faith isn't a deal where we use God to get the inside track or a special advantage or a secret magic formula for success. It isn't a mark of superiority or exclusion. True faith is about joining God in God's love for everyone. It's about seeking goodness with others, not at the expense of others. True faith is seeing a bigger circle in which we are all connected, all included, all loved, all blessed. True faith reverses the choice that is pictured in the story of Adam and Eve. In that story, Adam and Eve want to set themselves above everyone and everything else. True faith brings us back down to Earth, into solidarity with others and with all creation. Sadly, for many people, faith has been reduced to a list. For some, it's a list of beliefs: ideas or statements that we have to memorize and assent to if we want to be blessed. For others, it's a list of dos and don'ts: rituals or rules that we have to perform to earn the status of being blessed. But Abram didn't have much in the way of beliefs, rules, or rituals. He had no Bibles, doctrines, temples, commandments, or ceremonies. For him, true faith was simply trusting a promise of being blessed to be a

blessing. It wasn't a way of being religious: it was a way of being alive. And so this story not only tells us something about God's true identity and about the true nature of faith, it also tells us about true aliveness. If you scramble over others to achieve your goal, that's not true aliveness. If you harm others to acquire your desire, that's not true aliveness. If you hoard your blessings while others suffer in need, that's not true aliveness. True aliveness comes when we receive blessings and become a blessing to others. It's not a blessing racket—figuring out how to plot prosperity for me and my tribe. It's a blessing economy where God intends goodness for all. Like all of us, Abram and Sara will lose sight of this vision of aliveness sometimes. But even when they lose faith, God will remain faithful. Through their mistakes and failures, they will keep learning and growing, discovering more and more of God's desire to overflow with abundant blessing for all. And that's the path that Jesus followed and calls us to follow. Are you ready to step out on the same journey of faith with Sara and Abram? Will you join them in the adventure of being blessed to be a blessing?

Let us hold on to this truth within God's presence:  
I am blessed to be a blessing. Amen.

**Offertory: 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.**

**Offertory/Prayer of Dedication**

**Prayers of the People**

**Closing Hymn: Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery VU121**

Tree of life and awesome mystery,  
In your death we are reborn,  
Though you die in all of history,  
still you rise with every morn,  
Still you rise with every morn.



Seed that dies to rise in glory,  
May we see ourselves in you,  
If we learn to live your story,  
We may die to rise anew,  
we may die to rise anew.

We remember truth one spoken,  
love passed on through act and word,  
Every person, lost and broken  
wears the body of our Lord,  
wears the body of our Lord.

Gentle Jesus, mighty Spirit,  
come inflame our hearts anew,  
We may all your joy inherit,  
if we bear the cross with you,  
if we bear the cross with you.

Christ you lead and we shall follow,  
stumbling though our steps may be,  
One with you in joy and sorrow,  
we the river you the sea,  
we the river you the sea

## **Commissioning and Benediction**

**As you go into the world to be a blessing,  
Receive this blessing for yourselves  
May the love of the Holy One  
enfold you  
May the labour of the Birthing One  
deliver you  
May the wisdom of the Wild One  
Sustain you  
And May the peace of the All in One Sustain you,  
Bless you and guide you home. Amen**

