

**Lake of Bays United Churches
Sunday– June 25, 2023**

Lighting of the Christ Candle & Acknowledgement of the Land
(from Embers, by Richard Wagamese)

Announcements

Call to Worship

In days of old, God called Abraham and Sarah and Matthew.

“Follow me,” God still calls today.

The calling of disciples is never complete.

The work of discipleship never ends.

God calls us here today, to leave our past and become our future.

We come now to worship, in faithfulness and joy.

Prayer

God of the ages, God of today, You are compassion; our cup overflows.

You are hope; you lead us into green pastures. You are truth; you lead us beside quiet streams. You are life; you restore our souls.

Morning, noon and night, O God, you are the source of our joy.

We gather to worship you as one family of your people, honouring you as our Creator, trusting you as our Saviour, celebrating you as the Spirit who gives us life.

Merciful God, we confess we stray from your ways like lost sheep.

We follow the desires of our own hearts, ignoring the needs of others. We judge ourselves more generously than others.

We fail to offer others the forgiveness we seek from you. We nurse grudges and cling to our own opinions. Forgive the ways we betray your love, and return us to your paths of truth and mercy. AMEN

Words of Hope

May the God of mercy, who forgives us all our sins, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.

Amen. The Lord our God is rich in mercy, slow to anger, and abounds in steadfast love.

Hymn(VU #224) Sing a Happy Hallelujah

First Bible Reading Genesis 12: 1-9

Second Bible Reading Psalm 33 (VU#760)

Third Bible Reading Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Response to Scripture

One: For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Hymn (VU #567) Will You Come and Follow Me

Message

Offering Invitation

God offers us a future in Christ Jesus, sometimes through comfort and sometimes through challenge. We present our gifts to God in gratitude for God's faithfulness to us in every situation.

Offertory Song (VU#542)

Prayer of Dedication

God of healing and hope, you offer us what we need in Christ Jesus, not always what we want. Bless our gifts and use them to meet needs in lives touched by the outreach of our church. Give each of us courage to reach out in Jesus' name whenever you call. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of compassion and courage,
In our weakness you are strength.
In our sorrows you are comfort and peace.
We thank you for your embracing presence in our lives.
Embrace each situation we lay before you today with your steadfast love.

We thank you for moments of joy that break into our lives,
for love given and received,
for friends who furnish our life with meaning and happiness,
and for family who embrace us with love and understanding.
We pray for those who cannot feel joy today,
for any estranged from family or friends,
for those feeling stress as the costs of living rise,
and for those who face any kind of loss.
Embrace us all with your mercy, O God,
And give us grace to respond to needs around us.

God of the nations,
We pray for our country as Canada Day approaches.
We give thanks for peace and plenty in this land
and for resources to support those facing difficulties in our
communities.
Challenge those who govern to share resources as a generous
global partner,
and commit to international efforts to preserve the earth for future
generations.
Guide leaders to set fair policies that protect vulnerable groups,
and ensure equity and dignity for all.
Embrace us all with your mercy, O God,
And give us grace to respond to needs around us.

Eternal God,
We thank you for your people in every age
who have entered into your heavenly presence,
especially those dear to our own hearts.
Thank you for memories that inspire us,
for love and laughter shared and lessons learned.
Hear us now as we offer prayers in silence for the concerns on
our hearts this day...

Silence for at least 10-15 seconds.

We sum up our prayers, spoken and unspoken, in the words that
Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn (VU #333) "Love Divine"

Commissioning & Blessing

Go in faithfulness, ready to serve God, trusting that God counts your life as precious.

And may God bless you and keep you,
may God's face shine upon you,
and may God grant you peace. Amen.

Sunday, June 25, 2023
Lake of Bays Pastoral Charge
Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26
Genesis 12: 1-9

Prayer

Life-giving God, break into our lives with your word of abundant never-ending love and grace. Speak to us and through us, we pray. Amen.

Life is full of interruptions.

In fact, for many of us, there are times when life can feel like MOSTLY a series of interruptions in our good planning and organization.

Someone once said that 'life is what happens while we are making other plans.'

It's true, isn't it?

Life is so often found in the interruptions, not in the planning.

Interruptions like: the innocent note left on the table, announcing the marriage is over;

or the bombshell phone call from the family doctor, telling you that indeed, the test results did show cancer—or serious

heart problems—or any of thousands of life-altering diseases or conditions.

or the invitation into the boss' office to receive the news that your job is being terminated—immediately.

Or,

perhaps your life has been built on other kinds of interruptions:

the surprise announcement of a job promotion;

or the decision of an adult child to return to 'home territory'.

Maybe your plans have been interrupted by the joy of the birth of a child; grandchild; or great-grandchild;

the development of a wonderful new friendship;

or a new relationship with an in-law of some sort.

Our lives are marked—and indeed shaped—by the interruptions we encounter throughout the years.

Life IS what happens when we are making other plans.

This is not a new phenomenon—something unique to us, or to recent generations.

The story of Abraham and his call from God—a story as old as life itself—is a story of plans changed and life interrupted.

As most people do, Abraham is likely planning for a retirement that includes slowing down; resting and relaxing; taking more time with Sarai, his wife.

Yet what does he get??

A call from God to begin something new—something bold and risky and challenging; something that will consume his time and energy like never before.

The story of Matthew's call to follow Jesus may also be familiar to we who have been around the church for awhile. Whereas in the past we have often heard it as a story of obedience to God, today I invite you to hear it as a story of one man's life-planning gone awry.

Matthew's plush job as a state's tax-collector was a job of status and position and likely one of reasonable wealth. We can all imagine what sorts of plans HE might have for his future!!

But when Jesus comes along, those plans are spent with the tax dollars Matthew collects, as he gives it all up for the life of discipleship with Jesus.

Life truly is and has been for thousands of years, what happens when we are making other plans.

Thirty years ago right about now, life in our young family was unfolding just as it should have been.

Our jobs were fine; our children were doing well. Happy in school, they all played hockey and soccer and took music lessons of some sort.

We loved our home and our community. We had some wonderful friends; our debts were disappearing. Life was good. We had even started to think and plan, a bit, for retirement.

And then—life interrupted.

Spirit moved and all of our plans changed forever.

As I recall, I was sewing on that lovely spring day—drapes I believe—and as I worked away, I was carefully considering all of my options as a teacher.

I was restless in the position I had teaching elementary French; looking for something new and different—a new school; a new subject; a new challenge.

And as I thought and sewed, and basked in the warmth of the summer sunshine, the voice I heard so loudly and clearly could only have come from one place: it was God's voice.

It was Spirit speaking.

“Ministry is your answer,” it said. “Move into ministry.”

Now, I had lived with a minister for almost 15 years at that point in time. I thought I knew what ministry was all about!

I also knew that two ministers' salaries would not come close to the combined salaries of a minister and teacher; that the debts would be paid off nowhere as quickly as we were planning; and there would be even more debt incurred if I did choose to listen and to follow.

Yet, once the suggestion was there, I couldn't let it go—or perhaps it's better said that it wouldn't let ME go!!

The more I thought about it; examined it; prayed about it; discussed it with others, the better it felt. It just seemed like the right thing to do.

As I pursued this call, I felt a peace in my life that I had never known; a sense that all was right with the world—all would be well

—
although things would NEVER be what we had PLANNED them to be!!

As I look back now from where I stand today—3 years into my retirement after 23 years of ministry—I am convinced still that it has been the right thing to do.

All IS well with the world.

Things are not what we had planned all of those years ago, and thank God for that!!

For, I would not have met you, and the hundreds of other people who have come into my life throughout my ministry.

I would not have learned to trust God so completely as when there were limited finances and three growing, hungry, active children.

I would not have learned to listen for Spirit's voice in all the places that I now hear it; to see Spirit at work in all the places I now do.

Had I not listened to Spirit's call— and answered;
had God not interrupted my plans, I would never have learned that life—and faith—are truly what happen while we are making other plans.

Life and faith ARE what happen while we are making other plans.

Abraham and Matthew discovered that.

Isaiah and Paul and Noah and Andrew and Jeremiah and Peter—they all discovered that faith comes, and grows, right there in the midst of living life, and amidst all of its interruptions.

As inconvenient as they may seem;
as frustrating and surprising and unexpected as life's interruptions may be, they are not all bad.

Some interruptions are just that: difficult interruptions in living. Bad things DO happen in our world and in our lives—bad things that have no purpose or reason.

We make the best of them and move on.

But there are also the frustrating interruptions—those things that divert us and our plans—interruptions that are of God; or are used by Spirit to focus us and refocus us on our journeys of discipleship.

The interruptions are not always dramatic—more likely God’s voice speaking in quiet, prodding ways;
gentle interruptions like a burr in your sock, or a quiet whispered calling to reach out to love and care for others in any of a thousand different ways.

A phone call;
an unplanned is it;
an uninvited career change—however it happens God does interrupt our lives, and our plans, and sends us in new directions—directions we often had never imagined taking.

Spirit weaves together our longings; our interruptions; our dreams; and God’s call, and sends us on journeys that not only enliven us, but also enliven our communities around us.

Abrahams story—and Matthew’s story—stories of lives interrupted and yet faithful discipleship;
these are OUR stories.

They are stories of life and faith; of growing and blossoming beyond all expectation.

They are stories of a tender, caring, loving God who interrupts OUR plans; stories of a faithful Spirit who weaves

together the disparate pieces of our lives and moulds us into the best disciples we can be.

They are stories of a God who promises to be with us on every step of our life's journeys—not walking it FOR us but walking WITH us.

They are stories of the blessings WE bring to our community and to our world as we are led and blessed.

They are stories of God's kingdom of love and peace being built one interruption at a time.

May it be that as we live into life's big and little interruptions, we may have the grace to know God is with us and Spirit is calling us to join in this kingdom-building.

And above all else, may we know for certain that no matter what,
All will be well.

Amen.