

**Lake of Bays Pastoral Charge
July 2, 2023**

Welcome

Good morning! My name is Pat Edmonds and I am a Licensed Lay Worship Leader in Shining Waters Region. This week I attended my grandson's graduation from secondary school. This year 3 of my 4 grandchildren will be at university – 2 of them young women. As I sat there watching the graduates receive their certificates, I realized how blessed we are to live in a country where education is available, especially to young women. How often do we celebrate and thank God for this beautiful, democratic country in which we live? Yesterday was Canada Day and some of us celebrated with family and friends, likely eating and drinking more than we needed. Today let us give thanks that we are Canadians and ponder what this means.

Land Acknowledgement

We proudly and lovingly acknowledge the land and territory on which our churches and homes stand. We acknowledge and pray for the peoples, ancestors, and presence of the Indigenous peoples of this area of Lake of Bays and Muskoka. We also acknowledge all the Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit of this great land

of Turtle Island and their ancestors, and all seven generations before and after us in this place, church, and country of Canada.

Lighting the Christ Candle

This candle dances with presence of the Spirit, reminding us of the warmth of this community and country in which God calls us to gather for worship.

Call to Worship- responsive

One: Gracious and loving God, in whom all of creation and all peoples live and move and have their being, we gather this weekend to celebrate the 156th year since the Confederation of Canada.

All: As we gather, we recognize that a history of any people or country is not all glory.

One: The history of Canada has both joy and sorrow, both triumph and tragedy.

All: We have much to celebrate, much to lament, and much to dream.

One: We embrace one another as children of your Spirit.

All: Remind us of your constant presence, forgiving, restoring, recreating and making all things new.

One: Come, let us gather in the presence of God, our Creator.

All: Come, let us be filled with the Spirit's vision as we worship today.

Opening Prayer – VU 525 - unison

Hymn: MV 1 Let Us Build a House

Prayer of Confession- responsive

All: God of gracious kindness, we choose to examine honestly what it is that stops us from being the best we can be. We look at what holds us back from generous hospitality and radical welcome. We accept that we fail to include everyone in our midst, and that there are others that we turn away.

We are sorry. *(moment for silent reflection)*

For all this we ask your mercy. Amen

Words of Assurance - responsive

One: God saves us by divine mercy, no exceptions.

All: As a cup of water can wash away dirt and grime from our hands, and a cool cup of water can quench our thirst, so the grace of God cleanses us, restores, and revives us to continue on our journeys of faith. Amen.

Anthem: This Land is Your Land – Please join in the chorus.

Chorus: This land is your land; this land is my land;

From Bonavista , to the Vancouver Island,

From the Arctic Circle to the Great Lakes waters,

This land was made for you and me.

The Scriptures: Genesis 18:1-15

Matthew 10:40-42

A Message: Welcome!

When my granddaughter was a toddler one of her favorite books had wonderful buttons to press, and since she was very young you can probably imagine that she found it necessary to press the buttons not once, but as many times as possible. Unfortunately, the favorite button in the book was the one that imitated a ringing doorbell! Can you imagine what my wee dog did each time she pressed that button! Right! He went flying to the front door, panting and barking with his little stubby tail wagging furiously for he was the official greeter of our household and took this

position very seriously indeed. Usually, I had to end up going to open the door so he could see with his own eyes that there was no one on the doorstep. Only then would he give up the awesome responsibility of host and continue his daylong nap.

What do you do when your doorbell rings? It usually depends upon who it is, doesn't it? If you are expecting a friend, you will make your way quickly to the door and welcome him or her inside. If not, you may proceed cautiously – perhaps peering through the peephole or the curtain before you open the door. If it's a stranger you probably won't be very accommodating, at least until you find out what the stranger wants. Anyone who has canvassed door-to-door for a worthy cause or has tried to make a living as a traveling salesperson knows only too well the variety of receptions you might get in just one neighborhood.

What would you do if God were at the door? How would you receive God? Would you invite God in, peer cautiously out the peephole or sneak out the back door hoping God would think you were not home? I found this poem written by Lois Blanchard Eades – who has since deceased but her poem is widely used.

If Jesus Came To Your House

If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two -
If He came unexpectedly, I wonder what you'd do.
Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room to such an honored Guest,
And all the food you'd serve to Him would be the very best,
And you would keep assuring Him you're glad to have him there -
That serving Him in your own home is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming, would you

meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome to your
heavenly Visitor?
Or would you have to change your clothes
before you let Him in?
Or hide some magazines and put the Bible
where they'd been?
Would you turn off the radio and hope He
hadn't heard?
And wish you hadn't uttered that last, loud,
hasty word?

Would you hide your worldly music and put
some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right in, or would
you rush about?
And I wonder - if the Savior spent a day or
two with you,
Would you go right on doing the things you
always do?
Would you go right on saying the things
you always say?
Would life for you continue as it does from
day to day?

Would your family conversation keep up its
usual pace?
And would you find it hard each meal to
say a table grace?
Would you sing the songs you always sing,
and read the books you read,
And let Him know the things on which your
mind and spirit feed?
Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you'd planned to go?
Or would you, maybe, change your plans
for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him meet your
very closest friends?
Or would you hope they'd stay away until
His visit ends?
Would you be glad to have Him stay
forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great relief when
He at last was gone?
It might be interesting to know the things
that you would do
If Jesus Christ in person came to spend
some time with you.

The fact is God IS at your door and my door. Jesus said in Revelation 3:20 “ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.” So what should we do now that we know God is at the door?

Today’s passage from Genesis relates what Abraham does when God arrives at his door. Look at the way Abraham greeted these strangers. Even though he was rich and powerful, Abraham bowed before them and offered his services. Abraham’s humility teaches us that our neighbor is someone to be served, not taken advantage of! Abraham was a gracious host indeed.

Abraham may have discerned that there was something special about these visitors due to their sudden appearance in the middle of nowhere, but he has yet to discover that one of these men is the Lord himself. Abraham shows hospitality to strangers and entertains angels, and even God himself, unaware that he is doing so.

What do both our passages today say to us as members of the United Church of Canada as we celebrate Canada Day? In the first place, it says to me that angelic, divine messengers come in many forms to ordinary people. Alma, a lady in her 80’s, remembers living in her parents’ home during the Great Depression. Men riding the rails in search of work or food often found their way to her village in the Ottawa valley. It was not unusual for Alma’s mother to make a sandwich or two for a hungry stranger who knocked on the back door of their house in those dark days. When Alma asked her mother why she helped them, when other people just complained about these “dirty, lazy men” she was told, “ You never know. We might be entertaining angels unawares.”

Secondly, both these passages are about Christian hospitality. We learn hospitality from God, not Martha Stewart or the Food channel. God, through Abraham, shows us

how to treat all people who cross our path even if they are strangers. As Christians in this 21st century we need to place a high premium on hospitality and spend some time and energy learning and practicing the habits of the good host.

The Latin word that is generally translated as “host” can also be translated as “guest”. These two things, rather than being opposites, are profoundly inter-connected: being a “host” and being a “guest”, that is. Guesting and hosting. Being received and receiving others. Being welcomed and welcoming others. These things are intricately linked in human life, since no one gets to play the role of guest until someone else indicates the willingness to play the role of host. It is with the role of host that we Christians need to be especially concerned about these days. There is no denying the fact that this congregation and that of my home church are aging congregations, not at all atypical of our aging denomination and many other

denominations in this 21st. century. We need to place a high premium on hospitality and spend some time and energy learning and practicing the habits of the good host.

Do you recall the front-page story that ran in the United Church Observer a number of years ago? It described the exploits of a couple who were on vacation somewhere in Ontario, and decided to worship with a local congregation. They were not greeted at the door on the way in. They were not greeted at the door on the way out. Alas, nothing that transpired between the time they walked through those doors on the way in and the time they walked through those same doors on the way out amounted to an acknowledgement of their existence, let alone a word or gesture of welcome. Which is why they experienced unmitigated joy when they arrived, shortly after church, at the local Tim Horton’s, where immediately upon their entrance, the server flashed them a warm and

welcoming smile. It appeared to them that they were more welcome at a donut shop than in a house of God. I am also reminded of the series of workshops entitled “More Franchises Than Tim Horton’s” presented a couple of years ago by our denomination. We may have more franchises, but are we more welcoming?

I usually am very delighted with the welcome I receive as I visit several United Churches annually. But my position is quite different. I am welcomed as a person who has come to perform a service – to fill the pulpit as it is. But once, I attended a service as a guest and had a rather unsettling experience. I arrived, was handed a bulletin and chose a pew about halfway up the sanctuary on the left-hand side. But as I went to sit down, I noticed in the hymnbook rack the name tags of several members. It appeared to me that these places were reserved – by those who had left their name tags there the previous Sunday. So, I quickly went to

another pew but found the same scenario there. It took several tries before I found a spot that did not appear to be reserved by the presence of name tags. I did not feel particularly welcome and wondered if I should have called ahead for a reservation as I do at my favorite restaurant. The irony was that a month or so later I was called to do pulpit supply there and would you believe the theme of the lectionary passages that Sunday was “Hospitality”? God does work in mysterious ways.

As Christians and Canadians what are we challenged to do and be in this 21st century? Are we being challenged to be gracious hosts like Abraham to strangers and immigrants and refugees and people whose customs and ideas are unlike our own? Are we challenged to trust in God’s promises for our lives, our church community and our country as we face major changes in our denomination and in every aspect of our lives as we slowly try to adjust to a post-pandemic lifestyle? Are

we challenged to use our God-given gifts and talents rather than dwell on our inadequacies? I believe we are being challenged to do all these things and more. We are challenged to find creative ways of hosting and welcoming others. We are challenged as Christians and Canadians to not only show God's love to the world but to journey into the future with acts of love and kindness trusting in the God who led Abraham and Sarah in the past, the God who is with us here in this time and place and the God who will be with us forever! Thanks be to God!

Hymn: VU 523 O God of All the Many Lands

**Offering Invitation and Offertory Hymn: VU 541
Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow**

Offertory Prayer- unison

Creative and renewing God, we give thanks to you for the blessings we enjoy in this country: the diverse beauty of each province; the resources and opportunities to learn and grow; and the freedom to live and love, being true to ourselves. Bless these

offerings as you have blessed our lives. Inspire us to discover beauty in those who hold approaches different from our own, and to share the abundance of your love without limit. Amen

O CANADA LITANY - RESPONSIVE

O Canada, a people of many colors and faiths.

May we embrace our differences and diversity.

O Canada, a land where every person is not yet free.

We hold the truth that all people are created equal.

O Canada, a place where we are called to share with others.

So that none are hungry, alone, poor or homeless.

O Canada, a community of differing opinions and privileges.

We pray for freedom of thought, religion, opinion and expression.

O Canada, a country of vast prairies, majestic mountains and plentiful lakes and rivers.

In a world where we assume control over our own destinies, God invites us to be partners for the good of all creation.

O Canada, a home full of promise, hopes and dreams.

As we strive to be in mission with others, may we follow a path of kindness and goodness. May we meet our neighbors in fellowship and truth.

O Canada, a diverse past which shapes our common future.

God invites us to go from this place to share the good news of hope, peace, justice and love for all.

O Canada, our home and native land.

Hymn: VU 678 For the Healing of the Nations

Blessing

Rather than blessing Canada this day, I ask that God inspire us and enable us to continue and extend our role as those who bless this land, respecting and caring for this land and its resources, respecting and caring for all people who live here, as we continue the Canadian vision as a caring, welcoming respectful people. May we bless this land even as we are blessed.

Sung Blessing: VU 524 O Canada

