

**Lake of Bays United Churches  
Sunday– June 11, 2023**

Announcements

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

Call to Worship

In the spirit of faithful community and encouraged by the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have answered the call to worship in this sacred time and place.

**Let us bring the full gift of ourselves to be together as disciples of Jesus.**

Let us bring words, thoughts and actions that will fill hearts with thanksgiving and praise.

**Let us worship with a readiness to come alive in the Spirit and to discover anew God's way of living and loving in the world.**

Come let us worship God.

Hymn      MV #1      Let Us Build A House

Prayer

Spirit of living God, the ground of our being, your breath is our breath, your heartbeat echoes in us and it reverberates throughout the universe.

In this time of worship, open our hearts and create in us a quiet centre. May we go deep into our sacred part of our being where we are true to the will of your Spirit.

O God, expand our hearts to wider circles of compassion to embrace all peoples and the fullness of Your Creation as our kin, our friend, and our relations. May we see the oneness of your Creation as you see it and to know that it is good.

O eternal Spirit of Life, fill us with your love so that, we may love as Jesus loved, serve as Lydia served, sing as Mary sang, and dance as David danced.

May we do so with humble gratitude as we move to your sacred dance. Amen.

First Bible Reading          Jeremiah 29: 11 - 14

Second Bible Reading      1 John 3: 17-24

Third Bible Reading        Luke 6:43-47

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      MV #12, vs. 1-4      Come Touch Our Hearts

Message

## Offering

We honour the gifts of time, money, energy, of ourselves that we offer now and everyday. May they hasten the coming of the kingdom on this earth in this time.

Offertory Song      VU#542    We Give You But Your Own

## Prayer of Dedication

Gracious and loving God, all that we are, and all that we have come from you. We are so blessed and we praise you for your goodness and generosity. Out of gratitude and joy, we offer our gifts of money, time, and ourselves for causes greater than ourselves. Bless our offerings that they may be used to give hope to the downtrodden, compassion to the weary, justice to the oppressed, and peace to those who live in conflict in our communities and around the world. Amen.

## Prayers of the People

God of our past and our future,  
We come before you with grateful hearts,  
trusting that you walk with us through all the times of our lives.  
You create a future for us,  
calling each of us to use our individual abilities and opportunities  
to make a difference.  
Thank you that we all have a place and a purpose in your world.  
Hear us now as we pray for the world in its deep and diverse  
needs:

We pray today for those who face danger and despair in these  
times:

We remember before you those living with hunger,

and all those caught up in unrest and violence beyond their control.

*Keep a brief silence*

We pray for all those working to relieve suffering in these lives and bring justice and peace:

We pray For those who live with illness or pain....

For those bearing up with chronic conditions or disability....

For those who know the grief and change of bereavement....

*Keep a brief silence.*

And we pray for all those who work to bring healing and comfort and agencies which offer support and care to those who suffer:

We pray For those caught up in the pain of misunderstanding or broken relationships...

And for those working through situations of conflict at home or at work...

*Keep a brief silence*

We pray for all who offer guidance and support in the midst of such difficulties

and for those who have skills in reconciliation or mediation:

God of healing and hope,

Guide our congregation to engage each day with faithfulness.

Where we need correction, show us a new way;

where we need love and encouragement, inspire to us.

Unite us as we travel into the future you are creating for us as followers of Jesus,

as we pray the words he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn VU #232 Joyful, Joyful We Adore You

Commissioning & Blessing

Breathe in . . . the breath of life.

Breathe out . . . the Spirit of life.

Fears and despair fade.

Spirit re-orientes and redirects.

God's grace is given to each one of us.

Closing Song VU #649, Vs 1 & 2 & chorus Walk With Me

LOB Pastoral Charge

June 11, 2023

(an adaptation of sermon from Shining Waters Regional Council meeting & celebration of ministries)

*I begin with a confession: this sermon was preached two weeks ago at the regional council's celebration of ministries service.*

*At that service candidates were ordained and commissioned into ministry in the United Church of Canada, as well as welcomed in from other denominations.*

*After some welcoming and celebratory remarks, I started with this reminder:*

. . . may it be that today as the word is proclaimed and enacted we will ALL be reminded of our individual and collective calls to follow Jesus in a world that is ever-changing.

Please pray with me:

Pause

Open us, Holy Mystery, to your call, and in that call to know your overwhelming word of LOVE for us, and for this world. May my words be but a vehicle for your Word. Amen.

*And then I continued . . .*

Well, THAT day has finally come.

I know for many of you it's a day that feels like the end of a long journey.

But I want to let you in on a secret, if you haven't already figured it out: the journey does not end today—because the journey of discipleship never ends.

Your journey of discipleship and ministry is going to continue to take different twists and turns, as all journeys do, but as you continue living as followers of Jesus be assured that you do not journey alone.

*On this day we were celebrating those folk who were new to ministry. But it was Pentecost, and we were also celebrating our United Church of Canada. And so I continued. . .*

Also, today, we celebrate the church who calls you—and indeed, the church who calls each one of us: this United Church of ours.

It is a good day to celebrate our church because today this church—and many Christian churches around the world—honour Pentecost—a time traditionally recognized as the birthday of the Christian church.

And so today, as we often do on birthdays, it's good to stop and take stock of where we are at as a church—the good; the bad; and the ugly.

On the plus side, there are many things this church has in its favour:

our relentless pursuit of justice for all;

our radical welcome of ALL people;

our increasing interest in community in the broadest sense of the word;

and our insistence that unconditional love wins the day ALWAYS.

And then there's all of our new ministers. They bring to this church energy and hope and freshness;

a newness of spirit and thought and being.

They are definitely a plus!!

On the down side, there are at least a few things that would suggest that this church is not ticking along at 100%.

I suspect that I don't have to enumerate this list, so I simply remind us of a few things.

We are facing an unprecedented number of church closures and amalgamations.

Communities of faith are struggling with a lack of money and lack of people to do the jobs.

The average age in congregations is increasing.

The children and youth in congregations are disappearing.



Death and dying are all around us in our faith communities.

In fact, in a recent address to the convocation of Vancouver School of Theology, The Reverend Dr. Michael Blair, the General Secretary of the General Council of our United Church of Canada, talked of ‘the stench of death’ that is hanging around in our churches.

He spoke of how we are ‘hanging on to the corpse’ of the church and Christendom—paralyzed and afraid to step out into the future.

(By the way, I commend to you his sermon in its entirety, available on the VST website.)

He pretty much says it all, doesn’t he.

Things are not good in the church.

The future is uncertain, and it definitely will not—and cannot—look like the past.

If there was ever a time for faith, this is it.

If there was ever a call for hope, this is it.

If there was ever a need for newness and vitality it’s happening right now.

Church growth ‘experts’ and consultants have for the past 30-40 years made millions of dollars on ‘helping’ congregations look at their futures and plan for growth and positive outcomes—new life, if you will.

And yes, 10 step strategic plans and pages and pages of growth goals may have worked for awhile, but for those grounded simply in a need to grow—with little or no basis in the gospel, too many times these plans have turned into failure.

Our Song of Faith reminds us that this is an inevitability.

“The church has not always lived up to its vision.

It requires the Spirit to re-orient it . . .

challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement,  
for we are called to be a blessing to the earth.”

We are called to be a blessing to the earth;  
to live by grace;  
to be re-directed by the Spirit.

Two thousand years ago John the Evangelist reminded his community of the same truth.

In a call to them to return to the truths with which they began and to help them regain their footing as a group trying to follow in the way of Jesus, John’s simple words ring out:

We are called to LOVE—“not in word . . . but in action.”

“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

We all know how words of love can inspire or flatter, or often beguile.

But it's simply acts of love that are required of us as followers of Jesus.

ACTING out of love is the way of bold discipleship; of blessing creation; the way of breathing life into the kingdom here and now.

Quite simply, it's time to get up and out of our comfortable pews, and DO something:

time to FIND the lost and the lonely;  
time to seek out those who are hungry and thirsty for more in life;  
it's time to acknowledge those imprisoned by life and living.

Our call is to seek out those people in our own communities and ACT in ways of God's unconditional love.

For many of us this means change—GREAT change.

And, rather than inspiring hope and promise, that thought can bring despair and fear. Perhaps that's why it's called BOLD discipleship!

For others of us, putting words of love into action means continuing in the way we have begun: continuing to act in ways that fill needs in our communities.

Over the weekend of the regional council meeting we heard all kinds of good news stories of our church reaching out and actually acting out of love in our communities.

In recent years I've also heard stories of many many faith communities who have discovered hands-on ways to help.

There are the churches who offer thrift stores, helping those who can't afford to shop in other stores.

There are the churches who run full-day day camps, helping working parents with their childcare needs.

There are the the faith buildings offering indoor walking tracks and yoga and exercise programs; the churches who host community kitchens; and the churches who operate food rescue and sharing programs.

And then there's the church in the north that opens it's doors on Saturdays in the winter so snowmobilers can have a place to warm up with a hot meal.

The possibilities are as endless as the needs are; the actions as varied as the people with whom we serve.

The breath of life;  
the blessing of creation;  
the presence of the Spirit all wait for us to act.

Yet the fear and the hopelessness hang on—sometimes causing us to doubt; sometimes paralyzing us.

How on earth—or in God’s kindom—can we ever do this???

Well, consider this:

“We are not alone . . .

We believe in God who has created and is creating

. . . who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.”

Sound familiar??

It’s who we say we are as the United Church of Canada.

It’s what we say we believe—or try to believe—or wish we could believe.

But it’s even more than that.

It’s a promise that carries us through those times of fear and doubt and paralysis.

When we turn to today’s scripture, we hear another great promise to carry us through.

a promise of a future: a promise of hope and expectation.

“... when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me . . .”

“ . . . “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

What a powerful promise for the people of Jeremiah, long living in exile far from their homes and their God;

an amazing promise of life and hope . . . and even of resurrection from near-death—a gift of life-breath.

What a powerful promise for us, in the midst of our unease in this church of the 21st century!

And then Luke chimes in, talking of good trees and bad trees; of good fruit and bad fruit. Frankly it's all a bit confusing!

Traditionally preachers and teachers have interpreted these wisdom sayings in one of several negative ways.

Some have used it as an implied threat:

You can tell what the tree is like based on the fruit that it bears, so I'll be watching to see what kind of fruit you yield...and it better be good!

Some have encouraged listeners to hear these words as a kind of indifferent, almost laissez-faire, description of people:

What are you going to do? Good people do good things, bad people do bad. What more can you expect?

Today I offer to you a third interpretation:

I invite you to hear these words of Jesus as a promise.

You WILL bear good fruit.

Why?

Because that's what good trees do and you are a good tree!

Of course we are good trees!!

Created in the image of God, how could we be anything else?

Listen again to our Song of Faith:

“We sing of God the Creator;  
the maker of all that is . . .

Made in the image of God,  
we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God.”

We are created in God's image . . . long for . . . yearning for . . .  
life.

That life . . . that yearning . . . that is the good seed planted in  
each of us at our creation.

Breathe in . . . the breath of life.  
Breathe out . . . the Spirit of life.  
Fears and despair fade.  
Spirit re-orientes and redirects.

God's grace is given to each one of us.

Our own Song of Faith puts it this way:

“God transforms,  
and calls us to protect the vulnerable,  
to pray for deliverance from evil,  
to work with God for the healing of the world,  
that all might have abundant life.

We sing of grace.”

Grace and love overcome fear and death  
EV\_ERY\_TiME!!

Friends, today we do have much to celebrate.

We celebrate you.

We celebrate our church.

We celebrate the one who creates us in their image—good  
and blessed.

We celebrate our call together to be bold disciples of the  
Christ.

And we celebrate Spirit, who takes us by the hand . . .



or kicks us in the butt when needed—  
reorienting us in the light of God's love and grace.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.