

May 21, 2023
Seventh Sunday of Easter

We Gather In God's Presence

Prelude: "O Worship The King" Johann Michael Haydn Arr. Kenon D. Renfrow

Lighting the Christ Candle

Moment of Silent Reflection

Birthdays, Celebrations, and Life and Work of the Congregation – see last page ...

Call to Worship *(based on 1 Peter: 4:12-14, 5:6-11)*

We gather, as people set apart from the world.

We gather to worship God, whose mighty hand upholds us.

We cast all our burdens, cares, worries, and anxieties on God,

For God cares for us more than these.

We gather, as a community, as a form of spiritual discipline,

For we have faith that the Spirit of God rests upon us.

With humility and joy let us worship the Lord, our God.

Hymn: VU 402 "We Are One"

We are one as we come, as we come, joyful to be here,
in the praise on our lips there's a sense that God is near.

We are one as we sing, as we seek, we are found;
and we come needful of God's grace as we meet, together in this place.

We are one as we share, as we share brokenness and fear,
in the touch of a hand there's a sense that God is here.

We are one as we care, as we heal, we are healed;
and we share warmth in God's embrace as we pray together in this place.

We are one as we feast, as we feast, peace becomes the sign;
in the bread and the wine there's a sense of love divine.

We are one as we come, as we feed, we are fed;
and we feel God's refreshing grace as we meet at table in this place.

We are one as we hear, as we hear, heart and hand unite;
in the word we receive there's a sense that God is light.

We are one as we leave, as we love, we are loved;
and we seek justice in God's ways as we move together from this place.

Prayer *(unison)*

Holy One, you call us to witness to your love for the world, yet we are more likely to be deadbeat disciples and feckless followers. You call us to rise above the brokenness of this world to serve the broken in our communities, yet we are too busy searching only for signs of your presence and blessing in our own lives. You send your Spirit of hope to strengthen us that we may work for reconciliation, yet we are preoccupied with our petty grievances and vendettas. Forgive us God. Help us to open ourselves to the presence of your Holy Spirit within us. Give us eyes to see the needs of marginalized and broken of this world. Grant us strength, and courage, and stamina, and loving hearts to resist evil and work for your justice in this world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

We Are Blessed By God

Solo: "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" from 'The Messiah' George Frederick Handel *Nancy Quinn*

Time for the Young and the Young @ 

Hymn MV 157 "I Am a Child of God"

I am a child of God, I am a glimpse of God's new creation.

I am a child of God, I am a child of God.

I am an endless prayer, I am a yearning for contemplation,

I am an endless prayer, I am an endless prayer.

I am an angry voice, I am compassion and consternation,

I am an angry voice, I am an angry voice.

I am a cry for peace, I am commitment and dedication,

I am a cry for peace, I am a cry for peace.

I am a song of joy, I am the moment of jubilation,

I am a song of joy, I am a song of joy.

Psalm 68

Refrain: God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

Arise, O God, and let your enemies be scattered;

let those who hate you flee before you.

Like drifting smoke disperse them;

like wax melting in the fire,

let the wicked perish at your presence, O God.

But let the righteous be glad and exult before you;

let them rejoice with exceeding joy.

Sing praises to God's holy name;

make a highway for the One who rides the clouds;

be joyful and exult in God's presence.

Refrain: God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

Guardian of orphans, protector of widows,

O God, in your holy dwelling,

you give the lonely a home in which to live;

you lead the prisoners out to prosperity;

but the rebels must live in a wasteland.

When you went out at the head of your people,

when you marched through the wilderness,

the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain

before you, God of Sinai, God of Israel.

You sent down a generous rain;

you refreshed your heritage when it languished.

There your people found a home,

which in your goodness you provided for the poor.

Refrain: God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

Sing to God, dominions of the earth;
praise the One who has dominion,
**the One who rides through the heavens,
even the primal heavens,
the One whose voice is the mighty thunder.**

Acknowledge the power that is God's,
whose majesty is over Israel, whose strength is in the skies.

**You are awesome, O God, as you leave your sanctuary,
bringing power and strength to your people.**

Blessed are you, God of Israel.

Blessed are you.

Refrain: God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

Scripture: Acts 1:6-14

The Ascension of Jesus

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

The other readings for this week are: 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Meditation: "Witless or Witness?"

Hymn VU 715 "Come, We That Love the Lord"

Come, we that love the Lord,
and let our joys be known,
join in a song with sweet accord,
and thus surround the throne.

Let those refuse to sing
who never knew our God;
but children of the heavenly King
may speak their joys abroad.

The hill of Zion yields
a thousand sacred sweets
before we reach the heavenly fields
or walk the golden streets.

Then let our songs abound,
and every tear be dry;
we're marching through Emmanuel's ground,
to fairer worlds on high.

We Respond To God's Grace

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession & The Lord's Prayer (VU 960)

God our creator, our centre, our friend, we thank you for the blessings of life, for those who are dear to us, for those who have died, and for all who have helped and influenced us. Most of all, we thank you for the faith that is in us, for our awareness of you, and our hope in you. Keep us, we pray, thankful, faithful, and hopeful until our lives shall end.

Gracious God, we pray for the faithful all over the world, that all who love you may be united in your service. We pray for your church, may it continue to witness to your love for all creatures and all of creation. Especially we pray for Oneida United Church, and their spiritual leader Joan Golden. We pray for the peoples and leaders of the nations, that they may be reconciled one to another in pursuit of your justice and peace, and in pursuit of solutions to the woes that the entire world is facing at this time. This week we pray especially for the people of the Indian Ocean Islands of Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

We pray for all who suffer from prejudice, greed or violence, that the heart of humanity may warm with your tenderness.

We pray especially for all prisoners of politics or religion, and for all internally displaced people and refugees who cannot find a safe place to live in this world.

We pray for the land, the sea, and the sky, that we may live with respect in creation and use your gifts with reverence.

We pray for all who mourn, especially for the friends and families of Anne Haycock, that they may find strength for their journey and arrive at a place of comfort.

We pray for those who are ill or dying, awaiting medical treatment or recovering from medical intervention we pray; Rod Bartlett, Pat Martyn, Mac Toner, and their loved ones and caregivers and those known only in the silence of our own hearts....

May they find healing and wholeness of spirit.

God of compassion, into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, singing,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
for thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.**

Invitation to Invest in God's Mission

God has blessed us richly. In gratitude, we share those blessings with others that they might know hope and healing and God's presence in their lives. Our tithes and offerings will now be accepted, via CanadaHelps and Canada Post, the offering plate or the mailslot.

Offertory Hymn VU 327 "All Praise to Thee" vs. 5

Let every tongue confess with one accord
in heaven and earth that Jesus Christ is Lord;
and God eternal be by all adored:
hallelujah; hallelujah!

Prayer of Dedication

Holy and Gracious God, bless all that we offer, that healing and wholeness and hope might be known in the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Hymn VU 194 "Filled with the Spirit's Power"

Filled with the Spirit's power, with one accord
the infant church confessed its risen Lord.
O Holy Spirit, in the church today
no less your power of fellowship display.

Now with the mind of Christ set us on fire,
that unity may be our great desire.
Give joy and peace; give faith to hear your call,
and readiness in each to work for all.

Widen our love, good Spirit, to embrace
with your compassion all the human race.
Like wind and fire with life among us move,
till we are known as Christ's, and Christian prove.

Commissioning and Benediction

Christ is risen.... **And has ascended.**

God's eternal yearning has not ended, **It has become our own.**

We strive to make God's kingdom real in our time and place,

Empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Response: VU 884 "You Shall Go Out with Joy"

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace;
the mountains and the hills
will break forth before you;
there'll be shouts of joy,
and all the trees of the field
will clap, will clap their hands!

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands, (clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands, (clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands (clap, clap)
while you go out with joy.

Postlude: "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord" Ralph Long Tune: **St. Thomas** by Aaron Williams

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ALL:

Coming Services

May 28 Pentecost and Communion

June 11 Union Outdoor Service and Sunday School closing with potluck following

July 9 Union Outdoor Service with potluck following

UNION:

Church yard clean up: Wednesday, May 24, 9 a.m. Rain date: Tuesday, May 30, 9 a.m.

The Outreach Focus for the months of May and June is: Second Stage Housing.

Wish list: Antiseptic cleaner, Lysol spray or wipes, New Toilet plungers, New Toilet brushes

Liquid hand soap, Dish soap. Dryer sheets, Paper towels, Toilet paper

Stone Church Cruise Nights - Last Monday of the Month

June 26, July 31, August 28, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Everyone Welcome. Custom - Rods – Classics - Muscle Cars - Trucks

Special Interest & Vintage vehicles of all kinds

Hot Beef-on-a bun, Hot Dogs, Ice Cream, Cold Drinks

NOTE: In case of bad weather, come anyway because “rain or shine” we will be serving the beef-on-a-bun!!!

Lectionary Readings for next week:

(May 28, Pentecost)

Acts 2:1-21 OR Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:24-34, 35*b*; 1 Corinthians 12:3*b*-13 OR Acts 2:1-21;

John 20:19-23 OR John 7:37-39

Time for the Young and the Young @

- Good morning!
- Can you tell me the names of some superheroes? (*Superman, Spiderman, Batman, X-men, Avengers, Iron Man, Captain America, etc*)
- And can you tell me what some of their superpowers are? (*really strong, really fast, really sneaky, can fly, shoot things from their eyes, etc*)
- What do super-heroes do? (*save people / fight supervillians*)
- Now...what do you think normal people would do in the super-hero stories if there were no superheroes? (*The people would most likely do something other than sit around waiting for a superhero to save them*)
- I ask about super-heroes because the disciples treated Jesus like a superhero.
- They kept looking to him to figure things out and fix things for them.
- But in today's story, we hear that Jesus leaves the disciples – which means they can't keep having Jesus do things for them.
- At first, it might seem like Jesus is being sort of mean to his disciples by leaving.
- But the reason he leaves his disciples is so that they won't keep waiting for him to do things for them, so that they won't keep looking to him to fix and solve problems for them.
- With Jesus leaving, the disciples are then able to learn their final lesson from Jesus: With God's help, the disciples can do what Jesus did, now that Jesus isn't there to do those things for them.
- Jesus taught his disciples how to be God's super-heroes, just like he was God's super-hero.
- Jesus did this by teaching the disciples how to pray, how to keep their attention on God, and how to receive God's Holy Spirit.
- And guess what? We can learn the same things that the disciples learned from Jesus by reading the stories about Jesus and then practicing the same things we see him teaching his disciples.
- When we do these things, then we are learning from Jesus how to be God's super-heroes.
- And this is what God's super-heroes do: They love with God's love, they help with God's help and they teach others what they've learned about God.
- This is the Good News for today: Not only can we *learn* to be God's super-heroes, but then we can *be* God's super-heroes.

Dear God, Thank you for Jesus who shows us how to be your superheroes by *receiving* your love and Holy Spirit so that we can *share* your love and Holy Spirit.

Amen

Meditation: “Witless or Witness?”

Early in the week the first time I read the scriptures for today I noticed a couple of things. The gospel lesson contained a definition of ‘eternal life’ – “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God” (John 17:3).

And the reading from the book of Acts brought back memories of Elijah – “As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.” (2 Kings 2:11-12) “When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9). I wondered, was Luke comparing Jesus with Elijah, or casting him as the new Elijah?

When I reread the texts, trying to figure out which one to work with, I noticed verse 8 of Acts chapter 1. The risen Jesus and the eleven remaining disciples met and Jesus said to them, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Who can tell me what a witness is? Right, according to the dictionary, a witness is “an individual who, being present, personally sees or perceives a thing; a beholder, spectator, or eyewitness”; or “a person who gives testimony, as in a court of law.” Jesus was telling the disciples that they were to go and tell the entire world about Jesus, or so it appears.

Who can tell me what witless means? Right, according to the dictionary, someone who is witless is someone who is “lacking wit or intelligence, stupid, or foolish.”

On Thursday evening my wife and I went to St. Thomas to tour Indwell’s newest project there, The Station. It’s a collaboration between the city and Indwell. The city expropriated land for a new fire station and thought, ‘we need to house the homeless. What if we combine the fire station with deeply affordable, supportive housing?’ The building, or at least the upper two floors where the apartments are located, will be complete by the end of June, and the first tenants will move in this summer.

The Station has 45 apartments, each with a bedroom, a washroom, a small kitchen, and a living space. Some of the 450 square foot units are accessible. There is also a common dining room, a community kitchen, laundry facilities, office space for the support workers, and a couple of small meeting rooms. The support workers will supply, among other things, mental health support, behavioural support, and addiction support. There will also be help with learning how to cook and do all of the other mundane daily tasks that we take for granted, like how to fill out a job application or rehearse for a job interview, or how to apply for social assistance.

After the tour, we went to a presentation held at the local public art gallery. Indwell is celebrating another step in a goal to have 100 supportive housing units in St. Thomas. The first 15 opened a couple of years ago. The Loft supplies short-term housing. The station adds 45 units. And there are plans for another complex that will have another 45 to 60 units.

Several people spoke that evening. Some from Indwell, and some from other social services in St. Thomas. Two of those others spoke about the impact Indwell had had on their clients. They spoke of how finding safety and acceptance had been instrumental in helping them turn their lives around. They were witnesses of lives transformed, and they testified to us of what they had seen.

There was also a short video of Indwell tenants who spoke about their experiences, and what skills they had learned as residents of another Indwell housing complex. And, of course, when can you have any type of event like this without a politician showing up and speaking, the mayor of St. Thomas spoke. There was one thing that he said that was profound. He said, and I paraphrase, 'Until everyone is taken care of and has a place to live, we are not a community, we are just a place where a bunch of people live in proximity to one another.'

What the mayor was saying is that it isn't enough to say the right things, we actually need to do the right things. And that takes me right back to the scripture. It isn't enough to be a witness (noun), to tell people about Jesus, we have to bear witness (verb) to Jesus' life by showing others how Jesus lived by living the same way. We can witness, give testimony, in words, or we can bear witness in our actions, and in our lives. There is a famous quote,

mistakenly attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, that goes something like this, "Preach the gospel at all times; use words only when absolutely necessary." It is the spirit of what the mayor was saying. We need to demonstrate, by our actions, the things we say we believe, or in other words, we need to walk the talk.

Indwell believes in the inherent dignity of all people, due simply to the belief that all people are created by God in God's own image. It lives out that belief by treating all people, housed or homeless, addict or not, mentally ill or mentally healthy, with dignity. The difference between witness as a noun and witness as a verb makes all the difference in the world. I think Jesus was sending his disciples to witness (verb) to his life, by living out his lessons to them, as far as the ends of the world, and not sending his disciples to witness (noun) or simply talk about him. The latter is foolishness, for it lacks integrity.

We are Jesus' disciples in 2023. Will we be witless, or will we bear witness? The question is, what do you believe? Your actions are speaking.