

DORCHESTER UNITED CHURCH

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

SUNDAY MARCH 10th, 2024

WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Prelude: "There is a Fountain" Trad. American Melody, Arr by Victor Labenske

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we worship and reside on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe peoples.

It is in the spirit of reconciliation and right relationships, and working towards this reality that we come to worship the One who will empower and guide us with grace.

Lighting the Christ Candle

***Extinguishing a Lenten Candle** written by Won Hur. Used with permission. The United Church of Canada*

Though we yearn for great vision, many of our visions are limited.

Yet, we do not know how limited we are spiritually.

We do not know that we do not know.

Content to live with illusions and self-delusions, the people of this world do not even want to know wisdom and truth.

As prophet Joel said, when the leaders lack vision, it is the people who suffer.

We suffer from narrow leadership, compromised integrity, and self-centered values.

We experience the suffering of God's people on our streets, in shantytowns, in refugee camps, and in every neighborhood.

The fourth candle is extinguished.

All sing: MV 90 "Don't be Afraid"

Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,

my love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,
and I have promised, promised to be always near.

Let us pray.

All: O God, we long for enlightened leaders to emerge who have the audacity to hope and to declare the truth we long to receive. How long must we wait? How long must we suffer? Or are we the ones who are to embrace the visions and possibilities? Then open our spirits for us to embrace your truth. Open our minds to receive your wisdom. Open our hearts to love widely, generously, and deeply. May our faith shine through us and may we experience your kingdom on earth as in heaven. Amen

Moment of Silent Reflection

Call to Worship

God's love for the world offers healing from all our fears.

It is a love that never changes and lasts forever.

We never have to earn God's love.

We simply receive it because God is a perfect source of love.

Jesus came into the world to share God's transforming love with us.

Let us worship a God of undying love.

Hymn VU 234 Let us With a Gladsome Mind

Let us with a gladsome mind
praise our God forever kind;
whose great mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

God, with all-commanding might,
filled the new-made world with light;
for God's mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

God has with a gracious eye
looked upon our misery;
for God's mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

All things living God does feed,
with full measure meets their need;
for God's mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

Let us with a gladsome mind
praise our God forever kind;
whose great mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

Opening Prayer VU 110 A Lenten Prayer (Unison)

**God of love,
as in Jesus Christ you gave yourself to us,
so may we give ourselves to you,
 living according to your holy will.
Keep our feet firmly in the way
 where Christ leads us;
help our lips speak the truth
 that Christ teaches us;
fill our bodies with the life
 that is Christ within us.
In his holy name we pray. Amen.**

WE ARE BLESSED BY GOD

Ministry of Music: (Anthem)

“He Hideth My Soul”, Words: by Fanny J. Crosby, Music: by William
Kirkpatrick, Arr: by John Carter

The New Creed

**We are not alone,
we live in God's world.**

**We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.**

We trust in God.

**We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.**

**In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.**

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn VU 559 Come, O Fount of Every Blessing

Come, O Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing your grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,

mount of God's unfailing love!

Here I pause in my sojourning,
giving thanks for having come,
come to trust at every turning,
God will guide me safely home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
come to rescue me from danger,
precious presence, precious blood.

O, to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm drawn anew!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to you.
Prone to wander, Lord, I can feel it,
Wander from the love I've known;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for your very own.

First Lesson Numbers 21: 4-9

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' ⁶ Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Responsive Psalm 107 (Parts One and Two) p 831

Refrain: O give thanks to God for steadfast love

O give thanks, for God is gracious;

God's steadfast love endures forever

Let the redeemed of God say so,
those redeemed from trouble,

**whom God gathered in from the lands,
from the east and the west,
from the north and the south.**

Refrain

Some lost their way in desert wastes,
finding no place to settle;

hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to you, God, in their trouble;
you rescued them from their distress.

**You led them by a straight path,
till they reached a place to settle.**

Let them thank you, O God, for your steadfast love,
for the wonders you do for us.

**For you satisfy the thirsty,
and fill the hungry with good things.**

Refrain

Some suffered because of their sinful ways,
afflicted on account of their wrongdoing.

**They loathed every kind of food;
they came close to the gates of death.**

Then they cried to you, God, in their trouble.
You rescued them from their distress.

**You gave the word and healed them;
you saved them from the grave.**

Let them thank you, O God, for your steadfast love,
for the wonders you do for us.

**Let them offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and tell of your deeds with shouts of joy.**

Refrain

Gospel

John 3: 14-21

¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

Sermon

The Lenten Wilderness

Hymn VU 151 Lift High the Cross

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

Come, Christians, follow where our Saviour trod,
the Lamb victorious, Christ the Son of God.

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

Each newborn servant of the Crucified
bears on the brow the seal of him who died.

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

Saviour, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally.

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

So shall our song of triumph ever be
praise to the Crucified for victory.

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S GRACE

Birthdays, Celebrations and Life and Work of the Church

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

(The Prayer of Jesus)

Companion on the way, you have been with us in all of life's journeys. You are the source of our wellbeing and we have learned how to depend on you. But we have lost direction and are wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. The trials of life have overwhelmed us. We long for your presence again. Come and restore us to the relationship we once had with you.

There were times when we felt secure and filled our lives with the pleasures of this world. As we look back in longing for a past from which you rescued us, we have been blinded and need your vision to lead us through the darkness. The world has become a place where petty squabbles turn into unresolved conflicts and there is no peace. Thinking there is no way out, we turn away and forget that the One who has promised to walk beside us has not abandoned us.

Our cries seem to be in vain as we hope for a better day. Yet your love for this world sent Jesus to a cross to save us from the pride, self-will and arrogance that have overtaken us. Teach us the humility of service to a broken creation. May your spirit renew in us the solidarity we once knew

that we may feel again the pain of a broken world and learn how to bring suffering, despair, and poverty to an end.

In this Lenten season show us how to walk the way of the cross that we may transform darkness into light and suffering into hope. We pray in the name of Jesus who by his death showed us what true humility can be, and who taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
for yours is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Invitation to Invest in God's Mission

The Lenten journey calls the Church to discipleship. It is a journey of self-sacrifice that leads to the cross. Jesus saw his own mission as the One sent by God to bring hope to the hopeless and new life to the downtrodden. The Gospel invites us to become servants to one another as we share the journey that will bring us to Easter. Easter is not the end of the journey but a new beginning that makes us a new people.

Offertory Hymn VU 544

In gratitude and humble trust
We bring our best today
To serve your cause and share your love
With all along life's way.
O God, who gave yourself to us
In Jesus Christ, your Son,
teach us to give ourselves each day

until life's work is done.

Prayer of Dedication

We long for the time when the meek shall inherit the earth and all who hunger and thirst for justice will be satisfied.

We believe that despite the persistence of evil in the world we can make a difference.

May it be so as we offer these gifts. Amen.

Hymn VU 690 From the Slave Pens of the Delta

“From the slave pens of the delta, from the ghettos on the Nile,
Let my people seek their freedom in the wilderness awhile”:
So God spoke from out of Sinai, so God spoke and it was done,
And a people crossed the waters toward the rising of the sun.

“From the aging shrines and structures, from the cloister and the aisle,
Let my people seek their freedom in the wilderness awhile”:
So the Son of God has spoken, and the storm clouds are unfurled,
For his people must be scattered to be servants in the world.

When we murmur on the mountains for the old Egyptian plains,
When we miss our ancient bondage, and the hope, the promise, wanes,
Then the rock shall yield its water and the manna fall by night,
And with visions of a future shall we march toward the light.

In the maelstrom of the nations, in the journey into space,
In the clash of generations, in the hungering for grace,
In our agony and glory, we are called to newer ways
By the God of our tomorrows who is God of earth's todays.

Commissioning and Benediction

We are still longing for the journey to end.

The service is over, but we will not become complacent.

Our mission continues beyond this place.

May God grant us the courage to remain faithful to the call.

Be not afraid for God will shelter you and bring you safely home.

Response: VU 425 “God, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing” vs. 1
God, dismiss us with your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace;
let us each your love possessing,
triumph in redeeming grace;
O refresh us, O refresh us,
travelling through the wilderness.

Postlude: “Holiness Medley” (Jesus, I Come Whiter than Snow, Take
Time to be Holy), Arr by Melody Bober