

Lighting the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbol of the light of Christ, which cannot be held back by distance, which shines in each one of us, no matter where we are.

Call to Worship

We gather for worship,
some of us returning to a familiar place that feels a bit different,
and some of us from the comfort of our own homes.

Whether in shared space,
or through printed word,
or through the gift of technology,
we are a community of faith.

Here we seek connection to God,
Who we believe in, and who believes in us.
Come, let us worship God.

Learning Time Prayer

God, thank you that you are with us in everything. Help us to truly feel you with us, especially when we are feeling nervous or afraid.

Today, we ask for your blessing on our students, our teachers, and all the school staff and volunteers who have just started this new school year under difficult circumstances. Bless them and keep them safe, give them courage when they are afraid, give them compassion for one another, and give them wisdom to learn and grow and be in the best way possible.

Amen.

Offering

Take a moment to think of the gifts you have to offer God, not just your financial gifts, although those are necessary and appreciated, but the all gifts you have: your personality, your skills, your time. Imagine taking those gifts, and placing them in your hands. And when you are ready, offer them up to God.

Offering Prayer

Gracious God, bless the gifts that we give, and the gifts that we are. May each step of our journey lead us closer to you and your kingdom, and may our lives reveal your love to the world. Amen.

Prayer of Approach

God of grace and mercy, be present with us as a church family,
and as gather for worship, walking new paths.

In the ever-changing and uncertain world where we find ourselves,
help us to know and be assured of your unending power, love, and mercy.

We know you are a good God
who holds us in our anxiety and distress,
and celebrates with us in our joys.

Calm our hearts and minds and give us hope in you,
This morning, and always.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture:

Exodus 14:19-31

Exodus 15: 1b-11, 20-21

Matthew 18: 21-35

Reflection

So, way back in August, Maureen and I met to talk about fall worship service content, and we decided we would stick with focusing on the story of Moses and the Exodus, which we've been hearing the last several weeks. It's a foundational story of our faith, and we don't always get a chance to read it together in church.

So that was all well and good, until this week, when I looked and saw that the story we had today, our first Sunday back worshipping live, is this story of the crossing of the Red Sea, with a matching Psalm. It's a good story, a

classic story, but when you actually read the text, it's pretty disturbing in how it celebrates that God drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea. I mean, it's one thing to celebrate being saved, but to celebrate the death of others, it just doesn't feel right. So I was a little disturbed that this was our scripture passage on our first Sunday back.

But in my studying this week, one scholar pointed out that this story is written to be much bigger than an "us vs them", which is feels like. The wind of God over dangerous waters; the waters being separated, and dry ground appearing, it is meant to bring our minds back to the Creation story, when God's spirit, like a wind, hovered over the waters, the formless, chaotic void, when God separated the waters, and brought dry land into being, so that the animals, and humans could live on it. And so this Exodus story is reminding us of that, celebrating God's creative power, God's power to bring life into the world, even in the midst of anti-creation forces, which Pharaoh represents.

So when God is set against the Egyptians, it is not really about pitting God on the side of some human beings against other human beings, it is about pitting God's will to see life and creation flourish, against the forces of evil, chaos, violence, enslavement, and death.

Think of the situation before this miracle occurs: the Israelites have experienced so much pain for so long, their enslavement, the deaths of children, and then, even after Moses is sent by God to set them free, their threat was at first increased, you can imagine the anxiety that even those who survive would be under.

And in our scripture reading today, now they have come to a point where they are trapped- the army is coming up behind them, but the sea blocks the way in front of them- and they can see no way forward.

Like I said, at first, I was a bit dismayed that this was our reading for the first Sunday of a new, not-quite-back-to-normal, way of worshipping together. But I think our current situation brings up some similar emotions: anxiety because of death, pain, and chaos all around us, and a feeling of being trapped, being unable to see the way forward.

How can we worship together in the midst of a pandemic? How can this feeling like a sacred time, when some of our Body of Christ are online, and the ones that are present physically have to remain separated from one another?

Especially in this congregation, how can we worship without singing together? How can we care for one another when hugs and handshakes are risky?

This is not to say that our situation is the same as that of these people escaping slavery. But I think we know what it's like to have our world turned upside down, and to not be able to see what the path ahead looks like.

And this story reminds us of two things....first of all, that God is firmly against the powers of chaos, and death, and pain, in whatever form they show up in our world. God does not wish for our world to be in this situation, any more than God wanted the Israelites to be enslaved and killed. I don't believe God sent Covid-19 in order to teach us a lesson, or to bring us closer to God. There is a piece of Jewish Midrash that says that God's angels wanted to sing a song to celebrate God's victory over the Egyptians, and God said "My handiwork [the Egyptians] are drowning in the sea, and you are reciting a song before me?" God does not celebrate death, and does not fail to notice pain, but mourns with each person affected.

We also must remember, despite how impossible the situation the Israelites were in- I mean, they had a Sea in front of them!- God helped them find a way through it. As much as it feels impossible for us to go forward (I myself

keep having a hard time thinking further than the near future because I don't want to imagine still having these restrictions in place the winter, or next spring, or, you get the idea)- as difficult as this time is, God will help us find a way.

It may not be an easy way- I can't imagine walking on a path that used to be the bottom of a sea with waters on either side would be particularly easy, and I imagine the Israelites would be doing a decent amount of second guessing themselves along the way, too.

And it may not be a quick way either- we know after this crossing, the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years before they reached the promised land, and I hope and pray, dear God, may we not wander that long.

But, they made it through. God helped them find the way through the Sea. And in our scripture passage, we might also notice that it's not just God acting directly to show them the way. God gave Moses a task, and Moses stretched out his hand, and the seas parted. And those Israelites would have had to help one another to pick their way this perilous new path in front of them.

And God will help us find a way, too, even though the way forward seems strange and difficult. And part of what will make it possible will be all of you. I have to say, I am so thankful for the gifts God has given us in the leadership in this church, and I'm not talking about Maureen and I.

I mean the folks on our Board, and committees who have been meeting and working all summer;

people like Marleen Jonker, our resident public health nurse, people who have particular skills and have shared them generously;

people who have volunteered to help keep us in contact with one another during this time apart, and who have reached out to help the most vulnerable;

so many people who have kept this church running, and who continue to; and of course, the folks who have been working hard for weeks, some of whom showed up really early this morning, to put things into place so we can worship the way we are doing this morning- in person and online.

Look around and see God's creative action at work in this church. Have faith, that little by little, with God's help and guidance, we will find a way forward- not an easy way, not a quick way- but a way to continue being this church family, and to continue to serve God and love our community and our world, even in the midst of a pandemic. Thanks be to God.

Prayers of the People and Lord's Prayer

We begin by offering prayers for those in our circles who we hold in concern and thanksgiving, and then leave silence for our own personal prayers, and then move into the prayer Maureen read at the board meeting this past week, called An Architect's Eye, by Bruce Sanguin.

God, we join our hearts to lift up these people we care about in prayer:

We pray for all Staff and Residents at Kin Place and Springfield Place, including Cindy Chaput, Shirley Marshall and Pete Dueck.

We pray for Mona Smyth, Phil & Annette McKay, Bob & Beth McLeod, Pat & Tony Chabluk, Bruce & Nancy MacLean, Hugh & Val Arklie.

We pray for Diane Sauvé who will soon begin radiation treatments, and for Luke and Lindsey Belding, a Winnipeg newlywed couple dealing with a double diagnosis of a very rare cancer .

We pray for all those who have suffered losses: Joyce Doherty and family on the passing of husband Sam Doherty; Pat and Richard McIntyre and family on the passing of their son Michael; Diana Crossin and family on the passing of her husband John Paulsen; Marlene Friesen of Dugald UC and family on the passing of her brother Bob; and Gladys McDonald and family on the sudden passing of husband Ronald.

We pray for all who work in healthcare, and all who work in education. We pray with gratitude for their dedication, health, and safety.

God, we also give thanks for all our many blessings. We give thanks for all those recovering from recent surgeries, including John Bromilow and Audrey Blatz. We are grateful for our Youth Group, Sunday School, their families and all their Leaders who are doing their best to stay in contact as much as possible during these times, and for those who have worked tirelessly to re-open our church for in-person worship and to those key to facilitating our new live streaming online worship option

We also offer thanks and pray with celebration for Jackie South, wife of our former Minister Jerry South, who will be celebrating her 90th Birthday this month and to both Jackie and Jerry South, who celebrated their 65th Wedding Anniversary earlier this month.

God, we lift up these prayers, and others, which we keep in the sacred silence of our hearts...

O Holy One,
Faith is an awesome gifts,
Not that we believe in you,
But that you believe in us!
You have set within us the awesome power of creativity,
Entrusting us to shape a holy future.

Within us is the renovating vision of Jesus,
Able to enlarge the room we call reality,
Replacing walls with floor-to-ceiling windows,
Installing skylights to see the view above our heads.

Respectfully, we remove the ancient symbols from our sacred table
To spread out the kin-doms's blueprint,
Knowing that Jesus is present, with a sharpened pencil and an architect's
eye for the symmetry of the sacred.

With plans in place, we take up the hammer in the spirit of Noah,
Carpenter of a divine restoration,
And on behalf of all creation
We build on your belief in us.

We pray all this in Jesus's name, and we continue with his words, because,
O God, you are Our Mother and...

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 those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
forever and ever. Amen

Commissioning

Written by Rev. Nora Vedress, Calvary United Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

So now we leave this space of worship
And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain,
the path constantly changing,
we know some things that are as solid and sure
as the ground beneath our feet,
and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.
We know Christ's light endures.

We know the Holy Spirit this there,
found in the space between all things,
closer to us than our next breath,
binding us to each other,
until we meet we again,

Go in peace. Amen.