

## 03 September 2023 – Communion

### Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns *God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.  
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *Come, Holy Spirit (Gaither)*

#### Call to Worship

Give thanks and tell of God's gifts.

**We will sing praises for all that God has done.**

Let your hearts be joyful!

**We will seek God's presence continually.**

Call to mind God's wonderful works.

**We will remember the blessings of God and glorify God forever!**

#### † Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Loving God, we come to you as people striving to know better what it means to live our faith – to be powered by faith. Increase our knowledge. Teach us.

We thank you for providing us with so much spiritual guidance – through words of scripture, the life of Jesus, the traditions of the church, our families, programs of study and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We have taken in much of what you have offered.

Yet we confess, merciful God, that often we have been careless or afraid in our faith. Help us to put our faith into practice. Forgive us when we fail. Encourage us to be strong, courageous, and determined in our faith – daring to give our all to God and to love one another. Open our minds and hearts – enter in as we worship together. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

The God who blesses us with treasures of sense and spirit is the One who urges and empowers us to grow in faith. Thanks be to God!

➤ *Deep in the shadows of the past* **510**

A Word to Ponder... **holy ground**

➤ *The Lord is my song* **446**

† Prayer for Understanding

**Awakening, enlightening God, your Holy Word is all we need to guide us. Prepare our hearts and minds to receive the wisdom offered to us today in scripture and prepare our hands and feet to respond. Amen**

Scripture    **Exodus 3: 1-15**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, *"I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up."*

When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, *"Moses, Moses!"*

And he said, *"Here I am."*

Then he said, *"Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* He said further, *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, *"I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."*

But Moses said to God, *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

He said, *"I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."*

But Moses said to God, *"If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"*

God said to Moses, *"I AM WHO I AM."* He said further, *"Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

God also said to Moses, *"Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.*

### **Romans 12: 9-21**

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

### **Matthew 16: 21-28**

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, *"God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."*

But he turned and said to Peter, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

Then Jesus told his disciples, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"*

*"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### Message

Moses is out minding his own business – or rather his father-in-law's business – out at the edge of beyond – beyond the edge of beyond. He is watching sheep – how exciting can that be I wonder. It is an ordinary day and an ordinary place. There is no temple nearby where he might expect a divine appearance – no sign that this is a holy place. Unlike the owner of the sheep, Moses is not a priest or a prophet – it is an ordinary, everyday journey for him with no religious intentions. Mundane – perhaps even boring – this may be how we think of our own life, our own journey.

It is no surprise then, that when something catches his eye – when something breaks the everyday routine – Moses turns aside. It would have been easier and faster to continue on his way but as he pauses and turns his attention, a conversation with God becomes possible.

In these few verses we hear from scripture a truth the importance of which we cannot overestimate – God appears to us in the ongoing activities of life. Our temptation is to think that God comes in some religious way, at some religious time, even in some religious place. And perhaps is does for some, but more often than not God comes in the simple, commonplace experiences of our life.

Have you ever heard of *acedia*? It is the *Demon of Boredom* which refers to spiritual and physical lethargy that can plague people at different times in their lives. Many of us experienced it in the months of lockdown during the Covid outbreak – a collective sense of *acedia* – listlessness, fear, uncertainty, boredom. It is that feeling of wondering what it is all for when the life and work you are engaged in seems too ordinary – too trivial – a waste of time. That nagging suspicion that maybe God would be more present if you were somewhere else – that serving God would feel more meaningful in another context. I think it comes upon us most completely when we forget that God meets us in this moment and nowhere else – that as we turn aside in an ordinary day, in an ordinary place, God is there making that moment divine and that place holy.

So, Moses turns aside – draws closer to inspect this bush that is blazing yet is not consumed – and he is brought up short by nothing less than the voice of God. Here the story somehow pulls together the indescribable, the inexpressible, the awesome presence of God and the most ordinary of things: shoes. The words that are recorded for us are,

*remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.* Wherever we meet God is holy ground I suppose, but that doesn't mean that we meet God only on ground that is designated as holy! The encounter is what makes the place holy – home or office – shop or ski slope – beach or mountain – anywhere!

*Take your shoes off* – it sounds like what we often say when we welcome someone into our home. "Come on in, relax. Take your shoes off and get comfortable." Remember that in the time of Moses, inviting someone to take off their sandals was a sign of hospitality. The next step would be for someone to wash those tired dusty soles in the security of the host's favour. Moses finds himself in a presence that is unfathomably sacred, a presence that invites him to be at home at the same time that it claims his profound respect.

And consider how vulnerable one is without shoes – fleeing in response to danger is not quite as easy when the runners are across the room or outside the door. Moses finds himself a guest of God – vulnerable in body as well as mind and soul. "Take your shoes off Moses," says God, "you are my guest and I need you to be alert and open – vulnerable to my call."

On this holy ground – in this divine moment – God sums up the situation of the Israelites and what the response will be. Then comes the kicker – "So come, Moses, I – God – will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

"Who me?" responds Moses. "Who am I to do this extraordinary thing?"

And God says, "I will be with you."

The impossible becomes possible because God is present. Ultimately, the call really isn't about who Moses is – it is about who is with Moses. And it is the same call that is addressed to each one of us. All of us have some purpose in this world which serves God. Herbert O'Driscoll, local theologian and author, reminds us of a scene in George Bernard Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*, when Joan is trying to get Charles, the miserable Dauphin of France, to take action and show some courage. She says to him, "Charlie, there is one thing you have never learned." He asks in a timid voice, "What's that, Joan?" She says, "Charlie, you have never learned that we are put into this world, not to do our own business, but to do God's business."

So while Moses was minding his own business – his father-in-law's business – he was on his way to God's business without even knowing it. Is it so different for us? I read a *blog* from another minister who was thinking about what to preach this Sunday and she recalled that a couple of weeks previously a church member asked her to tell her call

story sometime. So, she decided this might be a good scripture to use – if only her call story were more interesting.

Someone else commented that all our stories are important. Each of us may think that our own story is drearily unremarkable but still our testimonies are worth giving – often our faith increases when we hear how others have been called – how they have heard the voice of God or been drawn forward in faith. Perhaps it's reassuring if our story is mundane – we don't all get a burning bush after all!

I was minding my own business – or so I thought – in a small school and in a small church – very near the edge of beyond in a prairie city. I was teaching children and studying the Bible in my spare time with others seeking to follow Jesus faithfully. Ordinary – very ordinary – when suddenly I knew that I needed to do something else – to take the study to another level – to change the focus of my teaching. Suddenly I was compelled to turn aside – to take off my shoes if you will, to listen to God's call and become vulnerable to God's plan for my life. Not everyone gets a burning bush.

What is your story? Are you minding your own business or are you tending to God's work? Have you taken a moment to turn aside and loosen your laces – to kick off your sandals and truly listen to God's voice?

Jesus knew what God's plan was for his life – knew that his work was God's business. He tried to tell his disciples – to explain what was happening. He *"began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*

No one wants to hear that! Peter certainly didn't like the sound of it – this can't be God's intention for you – "God forbid it!" he exclaims. It doesn't make sense to Peter that his wise, young teacher – the one he recently identified as *the Christ, the Son of the living God* – should come to such a quick and bloody end, one that could be avoided with a little careful planning. He did what we so often want to do – he protested the forecast that Jesus would suffer and die – he said out loud what others were thinking – there had to be another way.

But for Jesus this is the way – this is the call to a divine way that he is responding to. And he goes on to say that Peter is not on God's side but on the side of humans – Peter is not thinking about God's business. Jesus sums it up by asserting that any who would save their lives must lose them. Does Jesus mean that all of us who pray to be delivered from suffering and death are on the "wrong" side and that the side of God is reserved only for those ready and willing to die? Does he mean that all of us who want to be on God's side should go out and get ourselves killed as soon as possible? No!

In fact, Peter misses the part of what Jesus says that we also tend to miss – *and on the third day be raised*. We get stuck on the suffering and death part. We fail to notice that after the suffering and death there is life again – abundant life. If we allow the suffering and death to throw us off the track, we can get caught up in mere survival. We can let our fear keep us from taking the risks that make life worth living. We can be so interested in our own wellbeing that our life becomes cautious and thin and stale. Is this what God hopes for us? Is this the abundant life we have been promised?

God gives us our life and is not eager to take it away, but God wills more than our survival. God is not satisfied with merely our comfort and safety and happiness. God is most concerned with the quality of our lives – the depth and scope and zest of our lives. This is God's business, and we cannot be engaged in God's business if we fail to recognize that God meets us in this moment and nowhere else. Jesus tells us that *if we want to become his followers, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross* – whatever it might be – whatever plan God has for us. Wherever we are we need to turn aside – to take our shoes off and become vulnerable to God's call and God's way. This is the only way to find our life. **Amen**

➤ ***Rain Down***

† Offering and Prayer

The Apostle Paul encourages us to let our love be genuine as we contribute to those in need in the world around us. Know that God will use our gifts for good things, both those we undertake in Jesus' name and in ways we cannot yet imagine.

➤ ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow***                      **306**

**O God, we offer these gifts to you in hope and thanksgiving. Use them to transform the world you love with the mercy and compassion we celebrate in Jesus. Amen**

Vine and Branches<sup>1</sup> - an affirmation of faith

**We believe in God, the Root of all living, Creator of all things.**

**We live in Christ Jesus, God's Son, who loved all people and who makes us one in his love. He suffered, died and was raised to new life. In his death and resurrection, we are also raised to life that is transformed. Christ is our Vine, and we are his branches; and without him we cannot live.**

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<sup>1</sup> Methodist – General Board of Discipleship

**We live by the Holy Spirit, flowing through us so that we may bear fruit for God, the fruit of love. In the Spirit we are one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.**

**We trust in the one holy church, the communing of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the mystery of resurrection, and the grace of eternal life.**

### Gathering at the Lord's Table

The table of the Lord is ready. It is the table of companionship with Jesus. It is a place where love and grace never end – where we grow in relationship with Jesus. It is the table of sharing with the poor and broken – where Christ becomes flesh.

We come seeking strength and healing. We come seeking unity with Christ. Come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more... You who have been here often, and you have not been for a long time... You who have tried to follow Jesus and you who have failed... Come... It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

➤ *Here, O my Lord, I see thee (verses 1-3)* **543**

God be with you.

**And also, with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to God.**

Let us give thanks to our Creator God.

**It is good to give God thanks and praise...**

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours, compassionate Creator. At the first moment of time, you drew from the deep wells of gentleness and goodness. You wandered the fields, planting the seeds which blossomed into rainbows of beauty; you walked in evening's coolness, scattering the stars and moons into the deep blue-black skies. All that you made was given to us that we might eat, drink, and dance with you forever and ever.

But we did not understand all the blessing you offered, choosing to sit in sin's marketplace, as death played its mournful tunes for us. You offered us rest from our wandering ways, whispering to our souls through the prophets' heartaches.

When we could not, or would not, turn back to you, you sent Jesus to rescue us from ourselves. So, with every generation before us, with all who will come after us, we lift our voices in joyful praise...



***O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!***

In the fullness of time, you gave us Jesus Christ, to be for us the way, the truth, and the life. Holy are you, O God of every moment, and blessed is Jesus Christ, friend of the forsaken, Savior of all.

Graced with your glory, Jesus humbled himself to come to us, to lead us back to you. Yoked with your heart, he came to bear our burdens, so we might find rest in your hope and healing. Fed by your love, he came to eat and drink with all the outsiders, so we might dance forever in your kingdom of love. Embraced by your gracious will, he handed himself over to death, carrying the heavy burden of our sin, so the joy of resurrection might be revealed to us.

We give you thanks, O God, that as he sat at the table with friends; he took bread, said a prayer, broke it and shared the loaf with his disciples, saying: *"Take – eat – this is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."*

When supper was over, he took a cup of wine and raised it, saying: *"This is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me."*

As we remember his life, his death, his rising, as we come to this meal prepared for us, we proclaim the mystery of faith...

***Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!***

To what shall we compare your grace, O God? You pour it out upon us, and upon the simple gifts of the meal, through your spirit of gentleness. You feed us with the bread of hope, not that we might be satisfied, but so we would go forth to embrace the outcasts of our world, eating and drinking with them, offering your love.

You tilt the cup of mercy to our lips, not that we might become smug, but so we would be dissatisfied until all the broken are healed, until all the homeless are sheltered, until all the hungry are fed, until all the lost are found, until all the least are celebrated.

Breathe your spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine, O God. May they be for us your body – vibrant with your life in us.

**May we be one in Christ and one with your vision of peace and plenty. In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever and so we sing...**

***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

### Sharing Bread and Wine

The one who breathed on the first disciples is present for us in this bread. The one whose Spirit stirred the Church at Pentecost revives us in this cup. The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

*Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table. If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you. We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Both juice and wine are available. Pre-packaged elements are provided on request.*

### † Prayer after Communion

Amazing God, thank you for breaking into our world and living among us. Thank you for showing yourself to us in both subtle and boisterous ways. Help us to look for you, to keep watch for you, to wait on you, and to know that you are always working in our lives whether we recognize your handiwork or not. You enter our ordinary lives and set a holy table among us, filling our plates with the Bread of Life and our cups with Salvation. Send us out, O God, with tender-heartedness to touch an ordinary everyday world with the promise of your holiness. We are bold to pray as Jesus taught, singing...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven*** (*The Lord's Prayer – no repeats*) **469**

➤ ***Here, O my Lord, I see thee*** (*verses 4-7*) **543**

### Blessing

Love sincerely, genuinely, wholeheartedly and deeply – hold fast to what is good! And may the grace of the Living Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ ***Jump with joy*** **406**