

Order of Worship for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sunday, October 8 2023

Welcome

Prelude: Voluntary in G major by William Boyce

Call to Worship

Reader: Jim Ferguson

Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good;
God's steadfast love endures forever.
God crowns the year with bounty;
Pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy.
Valleys deck themselves with grain, and sing together for joy.
Let us lift our voices in praise for all God's goodness to us!

1st Hymn # 457 Now thank we all our God

Prayer of Confession - Unison

God of abundant love, in you our deepest desires are fulfilled. To you, O God we offer thanksgiving together with all your people, here and everywhere, now and always. God of abundant mercy, you see our failures to keep your law of love. We have not always loved our neighbours as you taught. Nor have we loved our enemies as Jesus commanded. Forgive us, the times we failed to live out your love. Renew in us the courage to offer others the generosity of heart you have shown us, in Jesus' name. Amen

Assurance of Pardon

If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. Everything old has passed away, everything has become new. Thanks be to God that we have new life, a fresh start every morning through God's gift of forgiveness and peace!

Prayer for Understanding

God, our Helper open our minds as the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed. May we be led to your truth, and know your will For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

2nd Hymn Bless the Lord (10,000 reasons) song booklet p. 4

Prayer of Illumination

Holy God, your thoughts are not our thoughts, and your ways are not our ways. As we hear your Word read and proclaimed, guide us by your Spirit, so that our thoughts and our ways are transformed by your grace, through Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

1st Scripture: Philippians 3:4b-14 [pg. 198 NT]

Reader: Jim Ferguson

⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in ^[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God

Choral Anthem: "Simple gifts of thanks" by Anna Laura Page

2nd Scripture: Luke 17:11-19 [pg.80 NT]

Reader: Wayne Stretch

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy ^[a] met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God

Meditation: A Journey Without Luggage

Reader: Wayne Stretch

My friend, Fernando, lived for more than 25 years as a refugee in central Africa. He was a teenager when civil war ravaged Angola, killing millions of Angolans including Fernando’s parents and siblings. Fernando was constantly on a run of terror. He survived, moving from an ungoverned borderland in one country, then another. Ultimately, Fernando found sanctuary in a UN refugee camp in Namibia, where he met his wife, herself the victim of unspeakable horrors. For over 20 years they and their 2 sons born there, lived in that Namibian refugee camp. It was a safe, but very meagre existence... always foreigners, always shunned. 4 years ago, they got the long prayed for news that they could be on the move again... to Canada.

Remarkably, Fernando describes life in the refugee camp as living ‘right next door to heaven’. He and Florence saw Christ in each deliverance from death, each move to safety along the borderlands, and every year of their time in the sanctuary of that UN refugee camp. Their dependency upon, their close, prayerful relationship with God converted the physical and mental suffering, the isolation and economic deprivation of those borderlands of central Africa from a forbidden wasteland to a sacred place, a place where the material and spiritual worlds were clearly inter-connected, deeply known and felt.

In our first scripture this morning, the apostle Paul considers himself to be living in a state of in-between-ness. He is suspended in a borderland of his own, in the middle of a journey ... and he is jubilant! He tells story to the Philippian church in abbreviated and passionate terms. As best he could, he lived a life of devotion to God as a Jewish believer, and a Roman citizen. But there was turn, a sharp turn for Paul... on the road to Damascus. Now the eagerness with which he had embraced his Jewish heritage, became the overwhelming eagerness with which he embraced Christ. “Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, and having a righteousness that comes from God based on faith in Christ” (vs 7-9).

“
Then he makes this curious statement: Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).

This is all possible because Jesus is the ultimate border-crosser. He models for us a ministry that continuously shifts the focus away from the people and places that are typically important or sacred and reframes the margins as places where God shows up in healing and liberating power.

The story of the 10 lepers... the grateful Samaritan - the returning leper, offers us another image of who and what matters to Jesus and should, therefore, matter to us. Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem (9:51), but he has stopped in the region between Samaria and Galilee; a 'nowhere' boundary land. As he enters a boundary village, ten lepers approach calling out to him but keeping their distance because they are unclean. They address him as master, a term used elsewhere only by the 12 disciples. The disciples recognized Jesus as 'Master' and so apparently did these lepers. And they recognized him for the same reason as the disciple did. They knew him! Just as the women and men on Pandora boulevard refer to Al Tysick as "Rev. Al" the lepers called out: 'Master, have pity on us.'" Luke says simply: 'When Jesus saw them", he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

There is a lot said in those few words of scripture. Jesus is asking a hard thing of them. His simple command is, in fact, very dangerous for them. They are to travel from the leper colony at borderland to the temple in Jerusalem. This command from the lips of any other man would have been a death sentence, and invitation to lawbreaking, an act of deliberate defiance. But these 10 must know that coming from Jesus, it's a pledge of healing. And **'as they went**, they were cleansed.'

Mark Buchanan writes: Much of what the Christian faith is about is caught in that simple pronouncement: 'As they went.' Our own cleansing from the numbness in us, the loss of feeling and the decay that comes with it, occurs 'as we go', put our hearts – and our feet - into what Jesus has told us to do. Buchanan envisions the scene: Jesus said, 'Go...and they're off! Running, running amazed to be running! They feel a surge and tingle in bones and flesh that have been long dead like sticks. They keep running.

But one stops. **"One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked him -and he was a Samaritan."**

The Samaritan's thanksgiving and prostration at Jesus' feet; his recognition that God is at work when Jesus notices and heals the hurts and brokenness that are not noticed by others; his understanding that to thank Jesus is to glorify God: this is what Jesus declares is the manifestation of **"faith that makes you well!"**(17:19). And this seems to come easiest to the people who have received most from Jesus, the ones who are otherwise ignored, scorned, untouched. As Jesus observes in the case of the anointing woman (7:47), 'the one who has been given much also loves greatly'. **Love which springs from gratitude is the essence of faith.**(C.S.Lewis)

Management consultant, Peter Drucker wrote that the core mission of all social-sector organizations is "a changed human being". The church's mission is its unique answer to the question: "Whose lives do we want to change, and in what way? A church that avoids that task – that simply seeks to please its members or keep doing what it has done in the past – falls short of it's true purpose. Growth, expanding budgets, buildings...matter only if they reflect positive changes in the lives of people."

Dan Hotchkiss, a church consultant, summarizes: “The church exists primarily for those who aren’t there. It is ‘owned’ by Christ’s mission ‘to go and make disciples in all nations.’ These are the lives we want to change, and being as Christ to them is the way.”

Rev. Al Tysick, who has served all his life among those in the borderlands of Victoria, offers this example of the life of Mikey Henning -a homeless man who was killed last month. It was in the Times-Colonist:

“A woman is coming down from a bad hit... she’s hallucinating, running around the park, naked and screaming. Mikey takes a blanket, wraps it around her and just listens to her as she comes down from this trip. It was done with such compassion and such knowledge of what to do in that situation.’ Mikey was a disciple-maker... showing up with a blanket, seeing this woman as Christ saw her.

There is no doubt something to be understood here about the people who live on the margins of our communities, who are treated as invisible or unlovely because of how they look or who they are or where they come from. Jesus clearly notices and loves them and calls us, and them, to do the same.

But we might also consider the parts of us that are hidden in the borderlands of ourselves where we may least want to be seen and most need to be touched. Jesus, who is not afraid of borderlands, walks beside us in those places, and by recognizing him there, we will find in our deepest selves a new outpouring of the grateful love that makes well.

Our neighbourhood here in the downtown core is a borderland for many of the marginalized, the lonely, the invisible in Victoria.

One by one, churches of other denominations are leaving the downtown... and those that remain here are finding that keeping an open door is a very challenging undertaking. The tents of Pandora St are there because Our Place is there. If we open our doors, they will come here very surely. We are a small elderly church family... we would be overwhelmed if we did so. So how do we help those on the borders outside the door this morning? With whom do we partner? What tools can we place in their helping hands, what can we pray for, what support can we offer those who, like Cool Aid Society, are an Open Door?

We know too, that there are several thousand people who walk by our doors everyday, and about 50,000 who live within a 20 block radius of us, and who are not homeless... but who have hopes, challenges, and spiritual longings. God has set us among these often very solitary persons. How do we connect... and how do we hear them, how do we welcome them into the family of faith?

All 3 churches share St. Andrew’s mission (Presbyterians believe) just as the neighbourhoods of Knox and Trinity are a shared mission. What are the burdens we can bear together? What human hurt, or hope, moves us? What is most important to us?

I feel like Paul felt toward the Philippians and the other NT churches. My years of ministry in our Synod, has given me a sense of belonging in each of our collaborating churches. I know a former Miss Victoria who felt beautiful for the first time when seen and embraced by the Knox church family. A women's group at Trinity was like Christ to my favourite aunt and helped her finish her life with a personal faith in Christ. I trust what I've seen in each church, and I trust God for what I've seen. I know too, that trust is as important in going forward together as it is in going forward with Christ. Can we trust each other, trust that it is God who is convening us as 3 churches? Christ who will lead us in mission together?

Jesus asks; 'Where not 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this Samaritan? Seeing God in the healing and praising Christ and thanking Him – this is what makes the difference between being cleansed... and living out a faith that makes us well!

Martin Luther said, "Worship is the lepers returning"! This morning, we are the returning lepers worshipping God... together. With faith and trust in God, and each other, we widen the surface area of Christ's presence, multiply the gifts of the Holy Spirit and add more burden-bearers praying, listening to and showing Christ to people.

In his book, *The Last Battle*, C.S.Lewis shows us a supremely active 'heaven' in which those caught up in new life run together, tirelessly, further up and further in, into a new world that is reminiscent of the old, but richer/fuller. The old world is left firmly behind and there is only one direction to go, onward and upward!

With thanks to God!

Musical Reflection: Adagio from Organ Sonata #1 by Felix Mendelssohn

Invitation to Offering

Reader: Wayne Stretch

Our lives overflow with God's blessing and goodness in Christ and in creation. Out of the bounty of our lives, let us offer God our gifts with overflowing gratitude!

3rd Hymn # 802 For the fruits of all creation

Doxology # 79 Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Prayer of Dedication

God of overflowing love, receive our gifts as signs of our love and commitment to live for you. Bless our gifts and our lives, that they may accomplish more than we can ask or imagine, as we follow Jesus, equipped by the Spirit to serve you well and wisely. Amen

Prayer of the People

Lord, our God,

whose glory is beyond compare;
whose mercy is boundless, and love for us is endless;
look upon us now in your compassion.

For peace that calms our hearts and saves our souls,
and for peace in the whole world and throughout creation.
Lord, have mercy.

Hear our prayer, Lord, for our unity as the Body Christ,
for the ministries we share with as sibling churches in Victoria,
and for your church around the world.
In these times of challenge, lead us to places of opportunity,

Hear our prayer for the whole of Your creation... in its beauty and bounty,
for the wellbeing of every creature and their habitats,
for a willingness to change our ways to protect places and people at risk,
and for Your beloved of generations yet unborn that they too may thrive,

We pray for the sick, the suffering, and the isolated,
for victims of violence, for refugees and captives,
for all experiencing affliction, danger, and distress,
we pray to you, Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
For all glory, honour, and worship belongs to you
now and forever... and to the ends of the earth.

Hear us now as we pray in the words that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer (debts/debtors) - Unison

4th Hymn # 807 We plough the fields and scatter

Charge and Benediction

Go out now and live with gratitude for God's generosity to us in Christ and in all creation. Be generous in your kindness to all who reach out to you. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope... by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

Amen #264 Sing Amen

Postlude: "Now thank we all our God" by Sigfrid Karg-Elert

Please remain seated.