

**Full Service Text:
Sunday October 4th , 2020
Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Music: Yuki**

Gathering

Introit: MV 18, Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary x 2

Welcome and Announcements

- from announcement sheet (these announcements can be found in service video or in the Friday Forecast e-mail from the church. To subscribe to e-mail news from the church please contact the church office.
- It is with sadness that I share that Allan Gates has died. We hold Marjorie and all of Allan's family and friends in our prayers.
- If you are planning on joining us for in-person worship please watch after the service for a special recorded announcement to help you know what to expect when you arrive.
- For all who are worshiping in person, please remember that following local health unit guidelines we will not be singing our hymns today. I invite you to join me in the spiritual practice of silence or to sing internally, as we rest in the hymns, allowing the music and the words to hold us, bless us, and draw us together in praise

Recognition of Traditional Territory

- As we gather for worship we remember that for thousands of years, Indigenous people have walked on this land; their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. As we worship today, we recognize that we are all treaty people. We are part of Saugeen Treaty 45 ½ and we are gathered on the tradition territory of the Haudensaunee, Ojibway, Anishnabek, and Metis people. We acknowledge the ongoing pain and broken relationship that has come with colonization. We pray that God may lead us in working towards building right relationships.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Centring Prayer – Micol

Today marks world Communion Sunday, and like a lot of congregations we are finding that we are unable to share in the sacrament of Communion this morning. World Communion Sunday has become a beautiful tradition that joins together people from all around the world, throughout various denominations, as we share at the table of Christ remembering the way we are all connected.

Sacraments are visible signs of God's presence and grace. They are ancient rituals and holy mysteries. As with so much else, COVID-19 has disrupted this in our church.

However, we know that that God is with us. God continues to draw us together in love wherever distance or belief divide us.

We can savour other things that open us to God's presence, that root us in Christ, that draw us together in faith.

-pause-

I invite us to focus on our breath moving in and out as we feel God's gift of air giving us life.

I invite us to focus on our feet, connecting us to this spot, knowing that where we are is a sanctuary made holy by God's presence.

I invite us to hold our hands together, to feel the warmth, texture, the presence of our own self, as we remember that we are a gift to this world, a beloved part of the body of Christ in this world.

I invite us to look around at those who are with us and to think about those who share worship with us from a different place. I invite you to wave and in your waving to share the peace of Christ, and celebrate God's gift of relationship – for God continually blesses us through the relationships we share.

These moments are sacramental – are a holy reminder of the sacred and life-giving love that fills all creation. These holy moments of living we share with all around the world today on World Communion Sunday and everyday.

Let us Pray:

God, we carry a lot with us as we gather for worship,
our joys and our sorrows,
our hopes and our fears,

our strength and our exhaustion,
our successes and our regrets,
meet us where we are, draw us together as a community of faith – however we gather
together this day
and centre us in your love.
Inspire us and equip us to take our part in building up your vision of love and justice here
and now.
Bless our worship and bless our living. Amen.

Hymn: VU 402, We Are One

Reflecting

Minute for Mission: “Access to Education in Zambia”

Heather Saumer

Today’s Minute for Mission can be found at:

https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/minutes_for_mission_2020_pdf.pdf

Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

Recording by Linnea Good

Sermon: Persistent Grace

Rev. Micol Cottrell

They had to rebuild the soil. As they looked over their new 200 acre farm all they saw was arid ground. The hard packed ground was loosened, fertilizer was spread, the ground was shaped, irrigation systems restored, fruit trees were planted and groundcover was established. Harmony has to be established, they were told by their guide on this farming adventure. But there were setbacks, coyotes ate the chickens, bugs ate the fruit tree leaves, birds ate the fruit, gophers chewed the trees and the roots. “Harmony has to be restored,” they remembered their guide telling them. Then they figured out that the chickens will eat the insects, owls will scare away the birds, and the coyotes will eat the gophers. Slowly over seven years balance and harmony was being restored. The dirt was filled with rich brown soil, the landscape was green and filled with healthy fruit trees, the animals and insects lived in a balance that meant that growth was possible for all. It took over seven years, a lot of work and frustration, a lot of moments of feeling hopeless, but

persistence that the dream and vision of the farm would take hold led them until the farm thrived once more.

This story of persistence is the one told in the film *The Biggest Little Farm* a documentary about a couple who decided to restore an abandoned 200 acre farm in California. It is a visually stunning film. As the story unfolds I was reminded of my deep admiration for farmers and the vision and persistence it takes to care for land and draw food from it.

For the majority of my ministry, thirteen and a half years, I have preached following the Revised Common Lectionary. The lectionary is a 3 year cycle of scripture readings that many churches use.

There are times, however, when I read what the lectionary offers up for the Sunday and I sigh. Today is one of those times. Today we hear the most violent of Jesus' parables. The parable has a rhythm to its storytelling, it builds upon itself. A landowner works hard, establishes a vineyard, piece by piece, until the day tenants are granted the right to farm the land. When the landowner sends his slaves to collect the harvest the tenants beat one of the slaves, kills another, and stone a third. So the landowner tries again, sending more slaves go to collect the harvest. Once again the tenants respond in the same way. Finally the landowner sends his son thinking – well there is no way they would harm him. But the tenants decide that if the heir of the vineyard is killed than they will be able to take over the land and keep all of the harvest to themselves so they seize him, throw him out of the vineyard, and murder him as well. It's a violent and disturbing story.

Today's scripture follows immediately after last week's with Jesus confronting the religious leaders following his protest and occupation of the temple. "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to those that produce the fruits of the

Kingdom,” Jesus tells the leaders today following the parable. Again, this is not a condemnation of Judaism or the temple but of failed leadership and faith. If the leaders will not produce the fruit of the God’s Kingdom in their leadership – to hear the cries of their people and enact their faith’s work of love and justice, Jesus tells them, God will find others who will.

If I were choosing a piece of scripture for this time, I would choose words of comfort and strength. Because I’m tired and I know many of us are as well. We are living in the midst of a global pandemic and as Professor Aisha Ahmad notes in a post that has been circulating around social media six months after trauma there is a high level of fatigue. We are not only worn down by what has been we are also aware that we are now living the midst of a second wave of infections in our province. We are worn down. In the midst of this vulnerable moment we have witnessed a great reckoning as institutionalized racism is being called out and the injustice and the death that racialized people live with is being witnessed to and work for healing and transformation is being called for. We are worn down. We are watching our neighbours to the south as they approach an election and witnessing massive division and animosity. We are worn down. We watch the news and we hear the numbers of infections, see the protests and the counter protests, wrestle with the broken realities of life, and hear more sorrow like the fire caused by arson that has destroyed the sacred building of our religious kin on Saugeen First Nations. We are worn down. Two members of our church have died recently and we are grieving. We are worn down.

How can a scripture passage like the one we hear today, filled with confrontation and violence bring any comfort to our worn down lives.

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My preaching professor when I was in theological school, the Rev. Dr. Paul Scott Wilson, invites preachers to divide their sermons into four parts, or pages, as he calls it. Here is a little peek behind the curtain of how I write my sermons. Page one is trouble in the text – some sort of conflict, wrestling, or problem. Page two is trouble in our life or the world. Page three is grace in the text – where it points to God’s love and God’s work in the world. Page four is grace in the world. Paul Scott Wilson reminds us that scripture, even the most difficult passages, always points us towards God’s love.

The parable of the landowner and the violent tenants is filled with persistence. The landowner is persistent in building the vineyard. There is persistence as the landowner sends the second set of slaves and then his son. Jesus then tells the leaders that even if they fail to produce the fruits of the Kingdom, to build up God’s love and justice, God will be persistent. Nothing can stop the Kingdom of God from being made known on earth. Failed leadership won’t stop it. Rejecting, silencing, or even killing those who proclaim it will not stop it. Those who are rejected as they try to build up God’s kingdom become the cornerstones of the Kingdom. Even Jesus’ crucifixion will not stop God’s Kingdom because resurrection has the final word. God’s grace is persistent and it will not stop until all is healed, transformed, and restored; until love and justice become the norm and life in the fullest exists for all.

Scripture always points us toward grace and life always leads towards healing, love, and justice because God’s grace is persistent. Yes, we are in the midst of a very difficult pandemic. But God’s grace is persistent. In the midst of this pandemic, this heavy moment, look at how much love is being shared. It is shared in those who care for one another by wearing masks, keeping in touch, praying and thinking about others; it is in the broken heart as we see beyond the overwhelming numbers of infection and death the lives of people; it is in the lives of all of us who have made adjustments in our work, our

homes, our relationships, those who are working hard for a vaccine, those who are struggling to make the best decisions for the health and safety of all. God's grace is persistent.

In the midst of this moment of reckoning around racism look how much love is being shared. People are taking to the streets in non-violent action as they hold onto a vision of a world healed. People in leadership, in organizations like churches, police departments, schools, office buildings, government buildings, and in homes are doing the deep soul work of how we overcome racism and discrimination in all of its forms by doing the work of healing ourselves, our relationships, and our world.

In the midst of loss, people continue to care for one another through phone calls, prayers, and acts of compassion. God's grace meets us in the worn down, aching, broken places of our life and our world. God's grace holds us and heals us. God's grace lifts us up and empowers us to be true leaders as we work with God in building up the Kin-dom of God where love and justice are a lived reality. God's grace is persistent and it will not stop working through us until all is healed, transformed, and restored; until love and justice become the norm and life in the fullest exists for all.

A barren farm can thrive with life again. Those who are rejected can become cornerstones of God's kin-dom. Worn down people can be leaders and fruit bearers of God, love and justice can become the norm, and the Kin-dom of God is made known. Friends let us live in God's grace and continue to be part of the amazing things that God continues to do. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Responding

Gift of Music

"Springtime In My Heart" by Martha Mier

Vera Struthers

Prayers of the People

Holy One, who fills creation with beauty and wonder,
On this World Communion Sunday,
help us to feel your Spirit at work, drawing all people together,
that in this time of Pandemic when so much seems to be lost, when so many feel
isolated, when physical distance and the lack of touch becomes painful,
we give you thanks that in you we are reminded that we are one, we are a community.
We give you thanks for all of the ways that we are able to connect and share with one
another.

We give you thanks for all of the love that is shared, all of the hope that is offered, all of
the comfort that meets us day in and day out.

We give you thanks for the beauty of creation, help us to remember our place in this
earthly blessing we share. We give you thanks for the harvest, and for all who draw food
from the earth.

Help us, O God, to remain ever mindful of the richness of life, and for the way in which we
are part of your blessing.

We pray for all who are struggling today,
for all who are living with loss because of natural disasters,
for all who are suffering from loneliness and isolation,
for all who are ill, in hospital, awaiting or recovering from surgery,
for all who are struggling through this pandemic,
for medical providers and staff in hospitals,
for all who work in education, families and caregivers, and students,
for Dr. Ian Arra, Dr. Dirk Huyer, and Dr. Theresa Tam, all who work in public health, and
our provincial and federal leaders as they continue to set policy and lead us through this
pandemic.

We pray for Annabelle and family and friends of Art Holley,
We pray for Marjorie and the family and friends of Allan Gates.
We pray for the people of Wesley United Church in Saugeen First Nation as they worship
today after loosing their building
And for the people of Saugeen First Nations as they try to find healing after the acts of
arson in their community.

We name now in silence our individual prayers

We pour out these prayers to you, O God, joining them with the prayers of all creation, as together we hold in our hearts the Lord's Prayer:

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.

Hymn: MV 154, Deep In Our Hearts

Blessing

Musical Benediction: Go My Friends In Grace by David Wight

Postlude

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