

## Home Worship Service May 24, 2020

Gathering and Centering Words partly based on Psalm 42

As a deer longs for life-giving waters,  
**so our souls long for you, O God, source of our lives.**

When shall we come and behold your face?

**We remember how we went with the crowds to the house of God.**

Our voices joyful and filled with praise,

**A multitude keeping festival.**

**Our souls are overwhelmed within us.**

And yet we trust:

**You bless our days with loving kindness, and by night your song is with me,**

**A prayer to you, Giver of Life.**

O send your light and your truth to lead us,

**Let them bring us to your dwelling place.**

And where, O God, do you not dwell?

**Be it in our homes, our gardens, in a Zoom gathering, on the pages we read,**

**In all that brings us blessing, in all that guides our path day by day.**

Come, let us feed our souls on your Wisdom,

**Your Love without limit, your great faithfulness.**

### We Sing

Great is Thy Faithfulness [singers on a Songs of Praise programme]

<https://youtu.be/dTKlqmdfHSk>

*Great is thy faithfulness, God our Creator,  
there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;  
as thou has been thou forever wilt be.*

[Refrain]

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided --  
great is thy faithfulness, ever to me!*

*Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

[Refrain]

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow --  
wondrous the portion thy blessings provide.*

[Refrain]

### Opening Prayer

In this Pandemic Easter Season, new life takes on a different meaning- as we have stepped beyond the life we used to know. We respond each in our own way, with our own mix of grief and acceptance, nostalgia and anticipation, anxiety and serenity. We open ourselves to the time that is now, seeking what gifts, what wisdom it may hold. Holy One, not knowing the time that is to come, we trust on your constant compassion, your emerging vision, your daring hope, as we step forward. Amen.

## **Readings from Ancient Wisdom**

### **Luke 24:35-53      The End of Luke's Gospel**

Then the two disciples told the Eleven and the rest of the company what had happened on the road to Emmaus and how they had come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' In their panic and fright thought that they were seeing a ghost. Jesus said to them, 'Why are you disturbed? Why do such ideas cross your minds? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as I have.' After saying this, Jesus showed them his wounds.

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Then he said to them, 'Remember the words I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.'

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day. In the Messiah's name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Take note, I am sending forth what Abba God has promised to you. Remain here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'

Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and, blessed them with upraised hands. While blessing them, he left them and was carried up into heaven. They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

### **Acts 1:3-11      The Beginning of Acts**

In my first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he appeared alive to them by many convincing proofs, over the course of forty days and spoke to them about the reign of God.

On one occasion, Jesus ordered them not to leave Jerusalem. "Wait, rather, for what God has promised, of which you have heard me speak." John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

While meeting together, they asked him, 'Rabbi, is this the time when you will restore sovereignty to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that Abba God has decided. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth.'

Having said this, Jesus was lifted up before their eyes, and a cloud took him out of their sight. They were still gazing up towards heaven when suddenly two messengers in white robes stood by them. They said, 'You Galileans, why do you stand looking up at the skies? This Jesus, who has been taken from you, will return in the same way you watched him go into heaven.'

## **We Sing**

As the Deer Pants for the Water

words and music by Martin Nystrom sung by Lucy Kerr who accompanies herself on harp, along with Patrick Davey on whistle and Mairéad Forde on fiddle

<https://youtu.be/jgKv87rAEE0>

*As the deer pants for the water So my soul longs after Thee  
You alone are my heart's desire And I long to worship Thee  
You alone are my strength, my shield. To You alone may my spirit yield  
You alone are my heart's desire And I long to worship Thee*

*I want You more than gold or silver Only You can satisfy  
You alone are the real joy giver And the apple of my eye  
You alone, etc.*

this is another version for you to enjoy sometime, sung by a lovely Welsh choir-mostly in Welsh so we can't sing along but it's beautiful <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Yd-f0pPDdk>

## **Jane's Reflection**

There is a wistful longing in today's Psalm-  
Longing for former times, gathered for worship in the temple-  
a wound in the hearts of our Jewish friends-  
They lost their temple 6 centuries before the birth of Jesus-  
And, yes, they got it back after decades of exile,  
But life was never the same-  
And then they lost the temple again and never got it back  
But were left wondering and wandering - Throughout centuries when they had no physical centre , no place anymore.  
Where should they now find God?

Jesus' friends were left with wistful longing too?  
In one version of the story, they encountered Jesus alive again, but just for one day-  
And then he vanished from their midst,  
Into the cloud of unknowing, into the unseen Divine Mystery- and they can't see him, talk to him, eat with him.  
They are supposed to be his beloved community--  
But they have to be community without their centre,  
Sheltering in place, but where to go from there?

In the other version, they encountered Jesus over a space of 40 days-  
And then again, he disappears, gone where they cannot follow.  
They look up longingly to the heavens  
But the messengers say- why look there?  
Who knows what they mean by Jesus returning?  
Wishful thinking on the part of the writer, perhaps.  
For now, , they had to go on without him,  
Sheltering in place, waiting for the Spirit to show them the way.

Is this not our story too?  
We walked out of our physical worship centres two months ago.  
Having to seek God , to seek spiritual centre, to seek beloved community another way

And now we are into a new phase-  
some small churches are already meeting with 10 in their sanctuary,  
some churches are no doubt hoping 50 next week,  
And some in the wider community ask when can churches open, when can young families go back even if some must stay away ?

But there is no easy answer for us,  
Any more than for the Psalmist, or for Jesus' first followers.  
If all our high-risk demographic stayed at home,  
Plus all who live or connect with high-risk demographic,  
who would be left to gather?  
And even if some desperately want to get back into the buildings,  
It won't be as it was ,  
If you take away singing and mingling and handshakes and hugs and coffee hour,  
If you add stringent social distancing and sanitation and disinfection procedures,  
Which volunteers would have to take care of,  
And keeping a record of exactly who comes in case of contact tracing,  
And on top of this map out exactly how many people we can seat with 6 foot space on all sides.

Some day you will go back in - but it's not for me to say when.  
First of all, your leaders will discern what to do when and how-  
And for them and me, our safety and our volunteers' safety come first-  
The command to love neighbour as oneself- that's central to our faith.  
Being in a building - that's optional,  
As Jesus knew, and his first followers knew.

There may be a middle ground- maybe smaller, safer , outdoor gatherings-  
Maybe walking labyrinth , one person at a time.  
That's part of discernment.

This I know.

There is no quick fix.

I can't go and fling open the doors and say Come in, you all!

Years ago, we did just that - in rural Nova Scotia- when one of our 3 churches had to be repaired after a fire-  
and great was the rejoicing when we could fill the pews for a grand re-opening.

Last year, we let everyone back into the Wesley sanctuary after it was closed for renovations- and then had  
several church-filling events in the weeks following- and great was the rejoicing!

But this is different.

Repairs and renovations have a beginning and an end - so do pandemics, we hope, but the end is not yet in  
sight.

So what is my word of hope, my good news for you and me?

This: that we are not alone

And that we can keep the faith, even deepen our faith, in the time yet to come.

The Hebrew people have lived without their temple way longer than when they lived with it.

And their Bible, our First Testament, came to be when they no longer had a physical centre of worship, and  
when in time to come some of them remained dispersed all around the ancient near and Middle East.

And as their Bible came to be- over many centuries-

They got themselves a whole library- it's not just one book but many-

Which is still there for you and me-

Still a place where you and I can meet God ,

A place where one book, one story, one text may at any moment speak directly to your heart and soul.

The Bible has challenges for the questioning, the inquiring , the modern mind- rightly so - much has changed  
over the millennia-

But in these days , it can feed our souls as it has fed souls all around the world in all kinds of times.

Remember when travellers would find a Gideon's Bible in their hotel room?

Wherever we are, in and out of church, on vacation, on staycation, the Bible, First and Second Testament, is  
there- you can even find it on your smartphone now.

Jesus' first followers had a person, not a building, as their spiritual centre.

But they and we have lived way longer without Jesus' physical presence.

And it was after Jesus' physical departure, that they got to work teaching, and preaching, and creating not just one Jesus community but many-  
And then they felt the need to write down his teachings and stories and their teachings  
So that the Jesus-movement would not die when they died.  
We are here today because of what Jesus' first followers and the followers of those followers did after he was no longer physically present.  
If they'd stayed looking longingly up into the skies,  
Wanting to reclaim what was,  
They never would have created what could yet be.  
Our second Testament and a beloved community still with us today.

And so too for you and me- we can look longingly back to 2 months ago- or we can look forward-  
We can think of what we were doing in the sanctuary- or we can think of where Spirit has led us since-  
What have we learned, what might we yet learn, on our journey with God- a journey that goes on wherever we are?  
And how might we create something better, something more enduring, something more inclusive than what we had before? For us and beyond us.  
God's people are never meant to look back but always follow where Spirit leads,  
Be it green pastures, wilderness, mountains, valleys, seashores,  
Be it church buildings or home or garden or cyberspace- or Bible and other sacred texts.  
When we go back into the building - who knows?  
That we will be beloved, faithful, compassionate community wherever we are-  
That is my prayer for you today and in days to come . Amen.

### **Special Music** Christ Has No Body Now but Ours

University of Notre Dame Folk Choir conducted by Steven Warner, who adapted the words from Teresa of Avila.  
Maybe his tune? Sing along if you can pick it up.

<https://youtu.be/1c2S6cVb0wE>

**Minute for Mission** *{note from Jane : the United Church has had many overseas personnel in South Korea over the decades- I've met some of them- and we now have a mutual ministry agreement with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea [PROK], known for their witness for justice and human rights You may remember we also had a Korean-Canadian Moderator some years ago, Sang Chul-Lee [1924-2017].*

### **Searching for Peace in the Korean Peninsula**

Over 65 years ago, the Korean War ended in an armistice agreement. The agreement created the Demilitarized Zone, or DMZ: a place where the two parts of the country can come together. The two parts of Korea, North and South, have very different political and economic systems and ideologies.

Some may think the differences are too great for the two countries to overcome and unite. Mission & Service of The United Church of Canada supports partners like the National Council of Churches in Korea that are working to unite both countries through a path of peace. There have been non-violent gatherings at the DMZ as well as walks for peace. We are thankful to be in partnership with Korean Voices for Peace and the World Council of Churches, which lift up the plight of families who are divided and a region that is still in conflict. The United Church is part of Korea Peace Now! Women Mobilizing to End the War, a global campaign to get a Korean peace agreement by 2020.

We pray that reunification will take place and are thankful that we are able to support this path through our gifts for Mission & Service. If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

### **Offering**

*[with thanks for all your generosity].* **As we receive gifts, even in these times, we give what we can, so that we can continue, indeed thrive, as beloved community , through all that is yet to come. May our giving and our living deepen our resilience , our compassion and our hope. May it be so!**

## **Prayers of the People**

God of power and wonder, the cloud of your presence removed your Beloved from human seeing and knowing. Mystery surrounds his life- and our lives too. And yet his life and death and new life remain as a companion to our faith journey. And we remain as beloved community, continuing his work and witness in our time and place. open always to new beginnings, looking ahead, stepping forward, with faith and courage

God of all wisdom, we await each day the guidance of your Spirit as we face many unknowns. May we discern how best to seek and share your good news in the times and places awaiting us. May we take inspiration from the cloud of witnesses gone before us, starting with those who continued the beloved community after Jesus was no longer physically among them, and continuing to those faithful people still with us. May we continue as a faithful beloved community even in these times, especially in these times.

God of healing and new life, we remember before you those struggling with illness, with loss, with trouble of any kind, especially where the pandemic has made it harder to find support and connection, those who are overwhelmed as they try to move businesses and lives into a new phase, those devastated by accidents and disasters and atrocities, be they in Nova Scotia or Pakistan,

Ever faithful God, we trust these and all our hearts' concerns to your tender and compassionate care. In a moment of silence, we hold in Love and Light those who need our prayers. May that same Love and Light surround and uphold each of us, drawing out our inner light, our inner love. These and all the prayers of our hearts we gather into the prayer shared by communities like ours, around the world and across the ages: Our Father/Mother/Creator...

**Announcements, Joys and Concerns** see *this week's Cooperator*

**We Sing** VU 713 I see a new heaven [Carolyn McDade], Strathroy United Church  
<https://youtu.be/BzVejfBb3SA>

***I see a new heaven, I see a new earth as the old one will pass away,  
Where the fountain of life flows and without price goes to all people who abide in the land.  
There, there on the banks of a river bright and free,  
Yielding her fruit, firm in her root,  
The Tree of Life will be. I see a new heaven..  
There, there where death dies and our lives are born again,  
Body and soul, struggling but whole  
Life flowers after the rain. I see a new heaven..  
here, there where the darkness brings visions from above.  
There where the night, bearing new light,  
Reveals the promise of love. I see a new heaven..  
There, there where we work with the love of healing hands.  
Labour we must, true to our trust  
To build a promised new land. I see a new heaven..***

## **Blessing**

Let us go forth, renewed for loving service, true friendship and joyful witness.

Let us remain open to Spirit as we move forward in these times.

And may the blessing of God who brings us to birth, gives us new life and is with us always as our companion be with you and with all, now and always. Amen

## **We Go Forth Singing**

Go in Love Don Besig, Westminster Presbyterian Choir, Greensburg PA  
[https://youtu.be/k\\_5i5IQDTzM](https://youtu.be/k_5i5IQDTzM)

***Go in love, have no fear. God will guide you and is always near.  
Go in love. Take God's hand. God will hear you, and will understand.  
May God's light forever shine upon you.  
May God's peace be always in your heart.  
Go in love; face each day.  
God will lead you and will show the way.  
Go in love and live in faith. Amen***