

## Home Worship , May 3, 2020

**Opening Words** That early Easter community seems far away - that long-ago energetic, enthusiastic new church, full of hope and promise- drawing seekers and visionaries and care-givers and justice-seekers, young and old, rich and poor- courageous and spirited even in the face of obstacles. And yet, whenever we gather, the heart and soul of that first Easter community lives again among us. Whenever we gather, in body or in cyberspace or in spirit- there is hope- there is promise- there is new life- there is God, the Holy One, use what word you will.

We sing Lead me God sung by the choir Somerville College , Oxford  
<https://youtu.be/nlwxEKdlQw>

***Lead me , Lord, lead me in thy righteousness. Make thy way plain before my face. [repeats]***  
***For it is thou, Lord, thou Lord only, who makes me to dwell in safety. [repeats]***

### **Opening Prayer**

**Holy One, you travel with us through green pastures and through dark valleys. You are at each table of friendship, hospitality, abundance. When we are in need, you are with us as living water for the thirsty. When we are lonely, your Love for us is even stronger. Together may we discover and share your good gifts- together may we sense your presence in our midst, as we sing and pray and reflect together. May it be so! Amen.**

### **We Sing.**

Brother James'

Air sung by Mormon Tabernacle Choir *[lovely visuals]*

<https://youtu.be/DvSVkHbLJVA>

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green; He leadeth me  
The quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again,  
And me to walk doth make  
Within the paths of righteousness,  
E'en for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
Yet will I fear no ill;  
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod  
And staff me comfort still.

My table Thou hast furnished  
In presence of my foes;  
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,  
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life  
Shall surely follow me,  
And in God's house forevermore  
My dwelling-place shall be

## **Readings**

### **Acts 2:42-47**

2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

### **Psalm 23**

God, you are my shepherd; I want nothing more. You let me lie down in green pastures; you lead me beside still waters. You refresh my soul. You guide me in right paths for your name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in your house, O God, forever.

## **Reflection**

Nostalgia comes easy to me, these days. About this time of year, we used to have turkey salad supper- Or we'd recognize Wesley grads with lunch and cake and gifts. Or, any time, the coffee on at Oak Hill or Scotch Ridge, potluck treats, spending as much time in fellowship as in worship. Joyful congregational singing of favourites old and new. Special music from our choirs. Generosity to the needs of others. Energy, enthusiasm, a welcome for newcomers.

This pandemic season makes me nostalgic for all our good times. I feel that same nostalgia in today's story from Acts- looking back to halcyon days, Everyone working together, caring for each other's every need, eating together, praying together, filled with the Spirit. And, it goes on, these congregations grew by leaps and bounds.

Churches have not always been like that/. Even in the ministry of St Paul, you read about squabbles, and competition, and tension. It wasn't always this high-energy, growing, thriving community.

And now we have pandemic- I can compare it only to experiences none of us have been around for- plagues, and, 100-some years ago, the Spanish flu- Another time of lockdown. Pandemic makes it harder to be with each other- we can't visit back and forth, we can't eat together, we can't go for coffee, we can't gather in our church.

And I've had to face- even when we do start using our buildings again, it's not going to be as it was, not until the pandemic has gone away or we have a vaccine- and that's further down the road than we want to think about. Social distancing, wearing of masks, no handling of hymn books- no singing, even, for a while as singing spreads germs worse than talking- no mingling before or after church- no coffee hour- no handshaking, much less hugs-

Under these conditions, it's going to be tough to feel like the community we want to be. And all the while, we are going to have to be super-cautious about how and when to gather, as we are mostly that age group who are supposed to shelter in place.

This pains me as much as it pains you- as I love all our ways of being community. But I know we have to find a way through this as what we have together is precious and it's worth keeping it going any way we can, nurturing our common life, caring and connecting- But out of love for each other, connecting in ways that keep us as safe as we can be.

I'll help you along as long as needed and wanted, but I know your Search Committee will find you someone else who will catch the vision, And you and that person will find a way through, even when living the vision might feel harder than usual.

I know- it's tough to keep vision and faith alive through this pandemic marathon-plus on top of that, personal tragedies and griefs, and community tragedies and griefs, griefs all the more grievous when we are without our usual ways of being together.

We have to reach deeper into our faith these days- I don't mean you've got to believe this and you've got to believe that- We all have different beliefs and there is room for all in our inclusive community- But somehow we need that connection to the Divine, the Holy, the Something or Someone more ,larger and deeper and stronger than our fears and struggles and griefs.

We don't have the words for what is or who is beyond us. But we have images- such as the Shepherd- A shepherd was a humble person, back in the day- no money, no nice clothes, no chance to get a bath- Working long hard hours, a heavy responsibility as there were so many dangers along the way- Sheep could wander off, wolves could get them, one sheep could lead others astray, a sheep could fall into the water- who knows what could happen.

In a sense, God the Shepherd is like the front line worker- caring for your loved one in the Lodge or Manor, tending the sick at personal risk, working in the store or the bank- so that you have what you need.

Even more- I'd say God is working through all those who are taking care of everyone, keeping all of us safe-

Perhaps even our government leaders- not that God favours political parties- but God is working through all who are trying to help provide what we need and keep us from harm-

And I hear God's voice as I listen day by day to the medical officers- as they do their very best to advise us well, as they show understanding and compassion for what we are going through, and especially for those who are ill or grieving.

Even as it's hard to stay isolated, I'm not alone and you are not alone, because of all these people who do God's work of feeding and tending and protecting us as best they can. I long for more such work to happen in our indigenous communities and among our homeless and among vulnerable populations everywhere.

That's where community matters- so that the Divine Shepherd's work gets done.

And for each one of us , we can trust that we are accompanied and guided through every time and season- Be it green pasture time or dark valley time- I have to say for me much of my assurance has come through people who care and help and pray- That's got me through many a dark valley-

But I also believe the Holy One, the Spirit , the Source, the Compassionate one, embraces us in the sun, and the greening trees, and all the wonders of creation - that's why we all need to get out more- And also Spirit, Mystery, God adds strength , mysteriously , to our own inner strength-

One way to put this is in the phrase "everlasting arms"-

Everlasting arms holding us up when otherwise we might falter or fall,

Keeping us on the path , making the way plain before our face, making us dwell in safety-

Come what may, never forsaking us , no matter what we might yet go through.

There is no way God or anyone else can guarantee that we will always be free from harm -

Any more than I can promise none of us will get COVID-19 though I'm doing my best to improve the odds, And you are too.

But we can guarantee that God is with us in all things, Love holds us close, we are at home with God be it now or in life beyond death. Always we are held and upheld in everlasting arms through every time, through every season- even through pandemics.

May it be so.

**Music** Leaning on the everlasting arms. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yysjZrGISdk>

Arranged by Eric Nelson and sung by First Plymouth Church, Lincoln, Nebraska [with a little Amazing Grace thrown in, and, in the orchestra, the occasional glimpse of a young person who'd had to get up a bit too early!]

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Leaning, leaning,  
Safe and secure from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Leaning, leaning,  
Safe and secure from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
What have I to dread,...

**Minute for Mission** *I picked this one for you though it's from last week- with all our handwashing and disinfecting we need to remember those who don't have clean water.*

### **Access to Clean Water**

Water is sacred—a gift of the Creator and a source of life. Clean water is a cornerstone of public health and a fundamental human right. In 2015, United Nations member states established 17 goals essential to sustainable development. The sixth goal is the availability of clean water for all.

Access to safe drinking water is one of today's most pressing environmental issues. Large numbers of people have no access to water and lack adequate sanitation to keep water sources clean. According to UN statistics, millions of people die every year from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation, and hygiene. More than two billion people are currently living with the risk of reduced access to freshwater resources. By 2050, at least one in four people is likely to be affected by a chronic shortage of fresh water.

The United Church of Canada, as a member of the World Council of Churches, joined with other churches in the Ecumenical Water Network, a Mission & Service partner. The EWN brings churches together in faith-based advocacy for the preservation, responsible management, and the equitable distribution of water for all. On-the-ground Mission & Service partners like People's Action Forum in Zambia and the Moravian Church in Nicaragua play important roles in establishing community access to water—from digging boreholes to providing training on pump maintenance and protection of the water supply.

Your gifts to Mission & Service help bring the provision of clean water to all people closer to reality.

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.

*Please continue to send your offering by mail or the available electronic methods, if you are not on PAR. All offerings thankfully received as the expenses of church and the needs of those benefitting from Mission and Service and other donations continue.*

**Offering Compassionate One, our hands are your way of feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, guiding the perplexed. Our hearts are your way of caring and comforting. Our gifts are**

**your way of sharing , so that all may have food , welcome, guidance, comfort and blessing. We offer our hands, our hearts, and our gifts, so that through us you can love this world. Amen**

### **Prayers of the People**

Ever loving God, we give thanks for the presence of your Light and Love among us in blessed and blessing communities, as we break bread, and hear sacred text, and pray, and share time together. We give thanks for those who appear to us along the way, who help us deepen in warmth and compassion.

We pray for those places where people need to meet each other, hear each other , understand each other, especially in places of war and conflict, We pray that Compassion may one day be stronger than all that leads to war and violence.

Closer to home, we pray for ourselves- that in these changing times we may learn creative ways of being church, Outside our walls, practising social distancing, Widening our circle to embrace all who might like to worship with us, be it by email or Zoom or on Facebook Live or by a service dropped in their mailbox, Remembering those lonely in our midst, Reaching out to those whom we miss or who may miss us. May we be open to what church can be in the slow months of re-opening , While ever mindful of the health and safety of our neighbours. May we trust: Divine Presence still remains within us, Shining light for each and for all, Finding a way to reach even through walls and doors and two metre distances.

We pray for those who are ill with COVID-19 or other illnesses, and for those isolated in long term care, and those working on the front lines in health care, home care and other essential services- Those who live in crowded conditions with limited sanitation, often where there is limited access to emergency health care- especially many in indigenous communities. Those asked to work without adequate personal protection equipment and other safeguards, Those exposed to family violence because of being isolated at home, And all those among us who are lonely, or overwhelmed, or struggling to maintain mental health. We pray for those who especially grieve in these times- the families of the lost helicopter crew , the families and friends and communities already devastated in Nova Scotia. Those who cannot be with their loved ones in times of illness and death, all those among us and beyond who mourn- including Chris and Ross as they grieve the loss of their daughter Michelle . We pray in the silence of our hearts for all those we know who are ill, or grieving the loss of loved ones, or in any other trouble and adversity- These and all our inmost prayers we offer in the name of Jesus who appeared to his friends in the breaking of bread and whose prayer we share with communities around the world. Our Father...

### **Announcements**

please see Friday's coop and for updates the covering email sent out with this service.

## **We Sing**

MV 154

Deep in Our Hearts

<https://youtu.be/YnZaO8udMcQ>

with Ron Klusmeier himself and a pick-up choir at Carman United Church [in BC I think]

*Deep in our hearts, there is a common vision.  
Deep in our hearts there is a common song.  
Deep in our hearts there is a common story,  
Telling Creation that we are one.*

*Deep in our hearts, there is a common purpose,  
Deep in our hearts, there is a common goal.  
Deep in our hearts there is a sacred message,  
Justice and peace in harmony.*

*Deep in our hearts, there is a common longing ,  
Deep in our hearts, there is a common theme.  
Deep in our hearts there is a common current,  
Flowing to freedom like a stream. ,*

*4th verse repeats first verse*

## **Blessing**

Let us take into the world that ancient, but ever new, vision of blessed community. Let us live that vision each day in our care for each other and for this beloved world. Let us trust in that presence of love without limit, our eternal home beneath and around earth's changing landscape. And may the blessing of God's unfailing love and light warm your heart and shine bright for all to see – that they too may know themselves blessed. Amen

## **We Go Forth Singing**

MV 214

May God's Sheltering Wings

<https://youtu.be/FUdLubvK958>

[Judith Snowdon] *led by a brave colleague who was apparently also leading the service*

*May God's sheltering wings, her gathering wings protect you.  
May God's nurturing arms, her cradling arms sustain you  
And hold you in her love and hold you in her love.*