



**Birchcliff Bluffs United Church**

**Ministers:** All the People – wherever and however they gather

**Minister of Word & Sacrament:** Rev. Dr. Ellen Redcliffe

**Music Director:** Randy Vancourt

**Readers:** Mary Cannings, Jessie Gordon

**December 10, 2023**

**Advent Two**

**White Gift Sunday**

**WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE**

**Prelude**

**Lighting the Christ Candle**

*First candle is lit*

On this second Sunday of Advent, we light this second candle symbolizing peace – the proclamation that God calls us to live peacefully in understanding.

*The second candle is lit.*

**Noticing the tiny flame, we wonder when the next puff of air will blow it out. We ponder that, if this candle were outside, it would quickly be extinguished.**

Still the flame flickers and flourishes—a symbol of the Prince of Peace living within us, a powerful image of strength despite perceived weakness.

**Hope Is a Star**

**VU 7**

Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,  
Giving a promise of safety and worth.  
When God is a child there’s joy in our song.  
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong.  
And none shall be afraid.

We come to affirm that divine peace thrives within us, a seed of inspiration strengthened by Spirit breath.

**We come to seek wisdom and daring to live lives of peace, transforming into a community of faith that builds bridges.**

We enter into prayer to receive the blessings of the peace that passes all understanding:

**Whisper to our hearts this morning, O GOD, help us to notice the chasms we create between one another. Breathe into our intentions that we become even more aware, believing we can make a difference, no matter how small we may feel. Lead us through the Way of Jesus to listen to one another in love. Amen.**

### **Land Acknowledgement**

We now take a moment to acknowledge the sacred land beside the water on which Birchcliff Bluffs United Church stands. It has been a site of human activity for many thousands of years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently the Mississauga's of the Credit and Scugog, all part of the Williams Treaty. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on this territory and we seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

### **Opening Hymn**

### **Make Me a Channel of Your Peace**

**VU 684**

Make me a channel of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me bring your love;  
where there is injury, your healing power,  
and where there's doubt, true faith in you:

Make me a channel of your peace:  
where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;  
where there is darkness, only light;  
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

O Spirit, grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
in giving to all that we receive,  
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

### **Call to Worship**

The dream of peace and justice is our Advent prayer.

**We commit ourselves to the way of harmony and righteousness.**

We worship, knowing that God's vision of peace begins with kindness and love.

**We herald the timeless message of Christ's shalom!**

Then come, let us worship God!

## Life and Work

### Opening Prayer

God, in whom we place all our hopes, we are keenly aware of the pressing needs around us, both our own and those of others.

**We come waiting, searching, praying for renewed beginnings amongst us. We long for the peace we discuss so often and for the hope to infuse all that we do and are. As we begin a new week, we pray for forgiveness and to pay attention to your still small voice within us. Come to us now, O God, in silence, in word, in prayer, and in song, even as we come to you ready to receive. Amen.**

### RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

**Scripture Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13** Prayer for the Restoration of God's Favor

<sup>1</sup> LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

**<sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin.**

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

**<sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.**

<sup>10</sup> Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

**<sup>11</sup> Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.**

<sup>12</sup> The LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.

**<sup>13</sup> Righteousness will go before him  
and will make a path for his steps.**

**Mark 1:1-8** The Proclamation of John the Baptist

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way,

<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;  
make his paths straight.’ ”

<sup>4</sup> so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going

out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with<sup>[1]</sup> water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Word of God for the People of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn**

**There's a Voice in the Wilderness**

**VU 18**

1 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,  
a call from the ways untrod:  
prepare in the desert a highway,  
a highway for our God!  
The valleys shall be exalted,  
the lofty hills brought low;  
make straight all the crooked places  
where God, our God, may go!

2 O Zion, that bringest good tidings,  
get thee up to the heights and sing!  
Proclaim to a desolate people  
the coming of their King.  
Like the flowers of the field they perish,  
like grass our works decay;  
the power and pomp of nations  
shall pass, like a dream, away.

3 But the word of our God endureth,  
whose arm is ever strong;  
God stands in the midst of nations,  
and soon will right the wrong.  
God shall feed the flock like a shepherd,  
the lambs so gently hold;  
to pastures of peace will lead them,  
and bring them safe to fold.

4 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,  
a call from the ways untrod:  
prepare in the desert a highway,  
a highway for our God!  
The valleys shall be exalted,  
the lofty hills brought low;

make straight all the crooked places  
where God, our God, may go!

**Sermon**      **To Bethlehem, with Love**    (Jessie)

**O Little Town of Bethlehem**  
(each verse sung separately)

**VU 64**

**v. 1**

O Little Town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,  
the silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark street shineth,  
the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

**v. 2**

For Christ is born of Mary;  
and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth,  
and praises sing to God the King,  
and peace to all on earth.

**v. 3**

How silently, how silently  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessed gift of heaven.  
No ear may hear God's coming;  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive God, still  
the dear Christ enters in.

**v. 4**

O holy child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in;  
be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.

O Little Town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,  
the silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark street shineth,  
the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

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the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

### Offering

God of peace, we offer our gifts knowing that you bless each and every one.

**Today we offer our time, knowing you bless each minute and each hour we share. In gratitude, we offer these gifts; with thanksgiving, we welcome your blessing. Amen.**

**We sing:**

**In The Bleak Midwinter (v. 4)**

**VU 55**

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise one, I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give him – give my heart!

### Prayers of the People

Holy One, breath of life, we are in an era of loneliness. A time when our world is in great turmoil, a time when we want to celebrate yet feel the hurt of our sisters and brothers.

**We feel the loneliness in our society, the joy mixed with sorrow in the people we meet. We yearn to know true community. Send your Holy Spirit to enfold and encourage us, give us peace when we turn to your presence. Remind us that your love is always with us; we are not alone...**

*Moment of silence*

**Creator, 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 and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever, Amen.**

## BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

**Closing Hymn**

**Herald! Sound the Note of Gladness**

**VU 28**

1 Herald! Sound the note of gladness!  
Tell the news that Christ is here;  
make a pathway through the desert  
for the one who brings God near.  
Sound the trumpet!  
Tell the message!  
Christ the Saving One has come!

2 Herald! Sound the note of judgement,  
warning us of right and wrong,  
turning us from sin and sadness,  
till once more we sing the song.  
Sound the trumpet!  
Tell the message!  
Christ the Saving One has come!

3 Herald! Sound the note of pardon!  
Those repenting are forgiv'n;  
God receives these wayward children,  
and to all new life is giv'n.  
Sound the trumpet!  
Tell the message!  
Christ the Saving One has come!

4 Herald! Sound the note of triumph!  
Christ has come to share our life,  
bringing God's own love and power,  
granting victory in our strife.  
Sound the trumpet!  
Tell the message!  
Christ the Saving One has come!

### **Commissioning and Benediction**

Hey, God! We offer our gifts of time, talent, treasure.

**We have wrapped them in the colourful paper of our diversity, tied them with the strength of our ribbons of relationships, and decorated them with the bows of self-giving. May you bless them as our presence in the world, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

### **Choral Benediction**

### **Go Now In Peace**

Go now in peace, never be afraid  
God will go with you each hour of every day.  
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,  
Know God will guide you in all you do.  
Go now in love and show you believe  
Reach out to others so all the world can see.  
God will be there, watching from above  
Go now in peace, in faith and in love.  
Amen, amen, amen!

### **Postlude**



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