



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

Rev. Gregory Daly: Minister of Word & Sacrament

Rev. Carmen Llanos: Minister of Community Development

Music Director: Randy Vancourt

January 9, 2022

WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE

Prelude

Call to Worship

God said, “Let there be light.”

And there was light.

God said, “Let there be a dome to separate the waters!”

And there was sky.

God said, “Let there be land and earth and vegetation!”

And there were all manner of trees and fruits.

Come and worship the God who speaks the words of creation.

We come to receive these creative words and to be made new!

Let us worship together.

Response

Let There Be Light

VU 679

Words: © 1970 Frances Wheeler Davis
Music: © 1976 Margaret Fleming

*Let there be light,
let there be understanding,
let all the nations gather,
let them be face to face;*

*open our lips,
open our minds to ponder,
open the door of concord
opening into grace;*

*perish the sword,
perish the angry judgement,
perish the bombs and hunger,
perish the fight for gain;*

*hallow our love,
hallow the deaths of martyrs,
hallow their holy freedom,
hallowed be your name;*

*your kingdom come,
your spirit turn to language,
your people speak together,
your spirit never fade;*

*let there be light;
open our hearts to wonder,
perish the way of terror,
hallow the world God made.*

Life & Work of the Church

Welcome to online worship



Land Acknowledgement

As we prepare for worship, we 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, part of the Williams Treaty. Today, the meeting place around Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on this territory. We seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.



Candle Lighting

When the voice of God called out at Jesus baptism, there was embrace and transformation. The candle we light represents Christ's light shining in the world. May each of us experience that embrace and transformation in our own lives and share that light with each other.

Opening Hymn

Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

VU 101

Words: Christopher Wordsworth
Music: Jakob Hintze

*Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus Christ, to you we raise,
manifested by the star to the sages from afar;
branch of royal David's stem in your birth at Bethlehem;
anthems be to you addressed, God in flesh made manifest.*

*Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest, and King supreme;
and at Cana wedding guest, in your Godhead manifest;
manifest in power divine, changing water into wine;
anthems be to you addressed, God in flesh made manifest.*

*Grant us grace to see you, God, mirrored in your holy Word;
with your grace our lives endow, grace to imitate you now,
that we like to you may be at your great epiphany,
anthems be to you addressed, God in flesh made manifest.*

Opening Prayer



*Water of Life, present at the creation of the universe.
Water of Life, present at our birth.
Water of Life, present at the baptism of Jesus.
Water of Life, present at our own baptisms.
We remember that at these times,
not only was there water,
but the voice of God was experienced and felt
speaking to us.
God, Water of Life, we come this morning to be filled
with your living water and to listen for your voice.
Amen.*

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

And Now for Something Completely Different



Every time you eat a pickle think of how different it is from eating a cucumber. The infusion of vinegar and spices makes it something completely different. Think of baptism this way, think of what it would mean to really immerse yourself in the vinegar of God, seeping into your pores, changing you through and through. Transforming you into something new and exciting as you immerse yourself in God.

Prayer of Illumination

*The scriptures proclaim to us the message of your light.
Loving and ever-present God, shine your light on us
so that we may discover and live a path that follows you.
Amen*

Psalm 29

- ¹Ascribe to God, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to God's glory and strength.
- ²Ascribe to God the glory of God's name;
worship God in holy splendor.
- ³The voice of God is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
over mighty waters.
- ⁴The voice of God is powerful;
the voice of God is full of majesty.
- ⁵The voice of God breaks the cedars;
God breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶God makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- ⁷The voice of God flashes forth flames of fire.
- ⁸The voice of God shakes the wilderness;
God shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ⁹The voice of God causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in the temple all say, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰God sits enthroned over the flood;
God sits enthroned as sovereign forever.
- ¹¹May God give strength to the people!
May God bless the people with peace!

Hymn:

When Jesus Comes to Be Baptised

VU 100

Words: © 1974 Stanbrook Abbey
Music: Musikalisches Handbuch

*When Jesus comes to be baptized,
he leaves the hidden years behind,
the years of safety and of peace,
to bear the sins of humankind.*

*The Spirit of the Lord comes down,
anoints the Christ to suffering,
to preach the word, to free the bound,
and to the mourner, comfort bring.*

*He will not quench the dying flame,
and what is bruised he will not break,
but heal the wound injustice dealt,
and out of death his triumph make.*

*O Spirit help us be like Christ:
to live in love and charity,*

*to walk in truth and justice now,
and grow in Christian dignity.*

*We praise you, God, source of all life,
we praise you, Christ, eternal Word,
we praise you, Spirit, gracious gift;
your triune presence fills our world.*

Acts 19:1-7

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ²Paul said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³Then Paul said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of Jesus. ⁶When Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— ⁷altogether there were about twelve of them.

These are essential words for us to consider in our lives today.

Thanks be to God

Sermon

Mysteries Abound

When I began the journey into ministry, one of the pieces of the puzzle that I found daunting was the idea that being ordained into a priestly function meant that I would now be a “keeper of the mysteries of our faith.”



I think what I was stuck on was the challenge of being the keeper of something to which I did not have an easy way to explain. It is not about keeping a secret, or knowing some grand answer that is alluded to in vague religious language. But I have learned that, yes, as an ordained minister, one of my responsibilities is to be a keeper of the mysteries of our faith by ensuring that the communities I serve hold up these mysteries as sacred.

Part of my work is to remember for myself and convey to all of you that God's works in our lives with and through these mysteries. When I was a student at Emmanuel College, I wrote a faith statement that helped me to organize my thoughts and engage the mystery. I have included it in the materials today. Baptism is one of these mysteries of our faith. As a sacrament, Baptism is about taking ordinary stuff – in this case, water – and mixing that ordinary stuff with the Word (last week we used different language – The Voice) and so with this combination of water and the Word, the Voice acting, you have a tangible means of God’s grace.

God's grace is revealed in this sacrament of Baptism by the act of our gathering together and mixing the stuff of the earth with the Word, the Voice.

In the United Church of Canada, we have two sacraments: baptism and communion. Both of them can be described through this idea of taking ordinary stuff, in one instance water, in the other instance bread and wine, and then mix it with the Word of Jesus the Christ. Through this mystery we have the means of God's grace made visible to us.

That is a pretty technical discussion, and like most technical instructions, they fall short of communicating the real action that takes place. One need only look at their IKEA instructions to know this. Definitions like those I have shared fail to capture the essence of the mystery, which at its very heart, at its root, represents the mystery of the reality that we call God.

As I have learned, being a keeper of these mysteries does not give me an inside track that offers the ability to reveal all that is happening as we seek to experience and appreciate the nature of the reality of the Divine.

The real truth is I have no concrete definition to offer you of this reality that we call God. I truly believe that the most important thing that I learned during my seminary studies is that sometimes the best answer is "I don't know."

There is an old adage that I often conjure when I think about this: The more I know, the more I know that I know nothing. I recognize that this unknowing can be unsatisfying. It is for me sometimes. I yearn to know God and all that God is as I seek to live my life. God is so central to my understanding of self, my living, and breathing, and being, that I want to really know the One – the Voice - who is the ultimate Reality.

Now, if you are not yet mystified by this explanation, let me tell you a story:

At our baptism we are named. My full name is Gregory John Daly. Most of you know that Greg suffices, in fact is preferred and I am not much for formality. Rev Greg even sticks in my ear sometimes.

But let me tell you that when I hear "Gregory Jonathon" I know my mother is somewhere close by and I am somehow being called to account. One of the strange things about middle names is that apart from legal documents, they are rarely used outside of church. Except when we are in trouble. To hear Gregory Jonathon made me sit up and pay attention.

To this day, if my mother calls me "Gregory Jonathon" I am immediately a child, her child. And though this is indeed my "Christian" name, I wouldn't want to hear God call me that, because I will just assume God is ticked at me.

What I want God to call me, is "*Gregs*" the term of endearment that my parents used when they wanted to communicate just how much they loved me. No matter how near or far, when I hear this, I hear love and I am loved.

I can't help but marvel at the fact that when Jesus comes up from the waters of baptism, and the heavens open up, and the Spirit descends like a dove, a voice from heaven is heard to speak. And the voice does not say Jesus' name, you don't hear a name. Instead, you hear my beloved, my child, with whom I am well pleased.

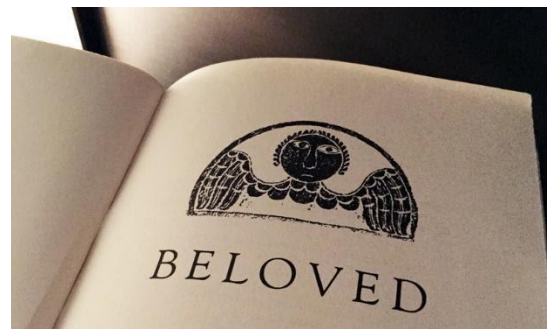
You hear a voice say – I am delighted with you –
What could be better than that?

In Acts, Paul asked people what they thought of baptism – into what name were you baptised. In other words – hey folks – what did you think was happening here?

What was happening was God claiming you.

What could be better than to hear that God who is love, calls you beloved. That's what happens each and every time someone is baptized. You go in with your name and you come out as God's beloved:

one with whom God is well pleased.



But it doesn't even end there, not for Jesus, not for you or for me. When we come up from the water, in this mystery, we live our lives. As we do, it can be difficult at times to hear God's voice. But I assure you, what I do know, is that just like my parents never tire of calling me "Gregs" God never tires of speaking to us. God continually says to each of us, "You are my beloved." "You are mine and I am yours." "You belong to me and I belong to you." "Don't be afraid." "Trust that you are my beloved."

It truly mystifies me that the voice of God is so soft and gentle, we know it as a still small voice. It is intimate and it comes from deep within us. Each of us needs to gradually hear that voice. It is important that we not just hear it, but claim it for ourselves, knowing that it speaks truth, our truth. It tells us who we are and whose we are. It is where our spiritual journey begins.

By claiming God's voice within us we are called to relationship with God and that grows within us. So, in all that mystery what I do know and what I can say, is that if you want to develop spiritually, it begins with listening and hearing the Voice and claiming what the Voice says as our own truth. Then go and live life as beloved. That is Good news for us today.

Amen

Hymn

Called By Earth and Sky

MV 135

Words and Music: © 2005 Pat Mayberry

*Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.*

*Precious these waters, endless seas,
deep ocean's dream,
waters of healing, rivers of rain,
the wash of love again.*

*Precious this gift, the air we breathe;
wind born and free.
Breath of the Spirit, blow through this place,
our gathering and our grace.*

*Precious these mountains, ancient sands;
vast fragile land.
Seeds of our wakening, rooted and strong,
Creation's faithful song.*

*Precious the fire that lights our way,
bright dawning day.
Fire of passion, sorrows undone,
our faith and justice one.*

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD



Offering

Today, we remember the baptism of Jesus and how your energy descended upon him.

We pray that your Spirit will envelop and energize us, so that we may take this offering and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Amen

Prayers of the People

We stand on the banks of the river with you, companion Jesus. We look at the stream of people moving forward to accept the gift of baptism—and we wonder. Do they truly understand how completely their lives will be disrupted? Are they truly aware of the challenge of living a life of faith that changes them from the inside out? Do they truly welcome the call to never be the same again?

For that matter, O Christ, do we? Do I?

Yet, as we watch those who have received their baptism, this washing away of what was in order to invite in what will be, we notice the look of transformation that gushes forth in their smiles,

We become aware of the change in their posture and the light that warms their faces.

That's the kind of wholeness for which we yearn. That's the kind of new life we seek as we share the confessions of our hearts with you, relayed silently within our hearts:

(a time of silent prayer)

Here we are God, wrapped within your loving arms of compassion, O Spirit, anticipating your intimate touch through the waters of life—your cleansing, your renewing, and your equipping of us for life's vagaries. We feel trickles of water over our face, down our backs, and into our eyes.

Each trickle maps a path of transformation.

Each trickle becomes a web of strength and of courage.

Each trickle disrupts life as we know it and prepares us for the renewed life we will come to know.

As we blink away the trickles from our eyes, our vision becomes your vision.

We understand now. You have taken us as we are, O God.

You have summoned out what we shall be. In baptism, you have set your seal upon our hearts.

Yet, do we know how completely our lives will continue to change through our baptism?

Be with us each step of the way—our companion and our guide, the one who taught us to pray together saying:



*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 for ever and ever.
Amen.*

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

Shine, Jesus, Shine*

Words and Music by Graham A. Kendrick

*Christ, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me*

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the sovereign's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Christ, and let there be light*

*Christ, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me*

*As we gaze on your shining brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me*

*Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the sovereign's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Christ, and let there be light*

Benediction & Commissioning

As you go from this place, know that you are beloved. May the still small voice of God, the descending dove of the Spirit, and the mystery of Jesus be with you all, today and always, Amen



Postlude

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Other Resources for Today

Opening Prayer Image: Water of Life
Sculpture by Stephen Broadbent, Chester Cathedral England, 2013

Other Lectionary Readings

Genesis 1: 1-5

In the beginning when God created¹ the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God³ swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1: 4-11

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”
⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”