



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

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

Minister of Community Development: Rev. Carmen Llanos

Music Director: Randy Vancourt

August 14th, 2022

WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Prelude

Jesus, Lover Of My Soul

Music: John Bacchus Dykes

Call to Worship

When you search for me, you will find me; when you search wholeheartedly for me, I shall let you find me. Jeremiah 29:13

Land Acknowledgement

We take a moment to acknowledge the sacred land beside the water on which we gather. 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 the Mississaugas of the Credit and Scugog. The lands where Birchcliff Bluffs United Church sits are 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 and we seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.



Candle Lighting

Gather Us In

MV 7

Gather us in, ground us in you

Gather us in, ground us in you

Gather us in, gather us in

Ground us, ground us in you

Opening Prayer

As we listen for your voice God in our midst, help me understand what I seek most. I recognize the people and experiences that have changed me and brought me closer to you and I am at peace. Continue to guide me in all ways, Amen.

Opening Hymn

Come O Fount of Every Blessing

VU 559

Words: Robert Robinson / Music: John Wyeth

Come, O Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing your grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing
call for songs of endless praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount; I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unfailing love.

Here I pause in my sojourning,
giving thanks for having come,
come to trust, at every turning,
God will guide me safely home.
Jesus taught me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God,
came to rescue me from danger,
precious presence, precious blood.

O, to grace how great a debtor
daily I am drawn anew!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to you.
Prone to wander, I can feel it,
wander from the love I've known:
here's my heart, O, take and seal it,
seal it for your very own.

We know: God is seeking us out when we sense:
Restlessness or unnamed loneliness within
A hunger for deep bonding- questions that keep surfacing
Clearer vision about life's meaning
A desire for greater truth – a yearning for justice
An unexpected sense of deep peace.

We know: we are seeking God when we experience:
Willingness to sit with unnamed stirrings within
Deliberate decisions to go deeper
Confrontations of fears, anxieties, and concerns
The discipline of reflecting, pondering, meditating
Owning and claiming one's inherent goodness
Entering situations that involve risk and struggle
Bonding with community or others who seek God.

Words & Music: Mary Bittner
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God says, "Be still so you may hear
the words I whisper in your ear.
If you will listen, you will know
I'm with you always where you go."

God says, "Come here! I need your voice,
Please teach my people to rejoice.
In who you are, in what you do,
your life will show my love for you."

God says, "Reach out! The world's in need
and wants a word, a song, a deed.
I send you forth to speak, to sing,
to act for Christ in everything."

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Jeremiah 29:10 - 14

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.

¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,

¹⁴ I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

I search for God, elusive, hidden God,
I long to dwell in the heart of mystery.

I search for my true self more of who I already am,
Knowing there's so much yet to be discovered.

I search for love, the unconditional love
That enfolds me and asks to be shared.

I search for vision in the shadows of my soul,
Impatiently awaiting the moment of lighting.

I search for a quiet heart amid life's harried schedule;
My soul cries out, yearning for solitude.

I search for compassion in a world gone deaf
To the cries of the hurting, and the pleas of the powerless.
I search for Home, always for Home,
Unaware, of course, that I am already there. - Joyce Rupp

Hymn

One More Step Along The World

VU 639

Words and Music: Sydney Carter
© 1971 Stainer & Bell Ltd.

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Round the corner of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn;
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough,
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me,
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Sermon Seeking and Finding

Parable:

An elderly man sat at North Port, where he sat each day for many years.

One day, a stranger came by and asked him what he was waiting for.

“I’m waiting for my ship to come in,” replied the man.

“I don’t see any ships ‘round here,” exclaimed the man. “Why don’t you come back to town with us.

What comes will come.” “I really couldn’t do that,” said the elderly man.

“If I leave this spot, that may just be the time my ship comes in.”

The man looked worried, “Don’t you think you could come join us for dinner?”

“No, I really cannot,” insisted the elderly man. I don’t want to miss my ship.

One day, I know it’s coming.” “How do you know it’s coming here,” the man asked.

“Because this is where it came before,” said the elderly man.

Shaking his head, the other man departed.

So, the elderly man sat, and sat, and sat, and sat, month after month, year after year, but his ship never came in.”

Exhausted and discouraged, at last he got up and went into town dejected looking for something to eat.

“There you are,” exclaimed his friends. While you were away, a ship came into South Port with your name on it.

But we didn’t know where you were, so we divided the bounty among us, and it left again.”

In our scriptures for today, God through Jeremiah instructs those exiled in Babylon to “prosper” in their cities. Foreign cities. With new neighbors. Pagan neighbors. They are to embrace their new life. Put down roots and grow strong in faith within their new environment. They are to integrate with their neighbors. They are to forge a new home. They are to sing the “Lord’s song” in a “foreign land.”

They are neither simply to wait around hoping for something better nor mourn for what was lost. They are not to rise up in revolution against their neighbors and countrymen, nor hide away refusing to engage.

They are not to wait until God swoops in and brings them back to the land they had once called home. But they are to “love the ones they are with,” and cultivate their covenant faith wherever they are, no matter how long it takes.

Huge amounts of the most gifted Jewish people were deported from their homes and relocated in Babylonian cities. But whereas the prior Assyrians had been brutal and vicious overlords, the Babylonians were much kinder to the Jewish people.

The Assyrians had carried many off into slavery and had killed men, women, and children alike. The Babylonians allowed Jewish communities to flourish in Babylon. Synagogues and schools of learning were established. Judaism was tolerated if not admired among many of their foreign neighbors.

The prophet Jeremiah encourages the growth of these Jewish communities. If their cities flourish, the Jewish people too will flourish, he reasoned. In a sense, his message says, “what benefits me will benefit you, so let’s get along, so that we can benefit each other.”

So, while God’s people never stop praying, they begin to realize, they can establish a new and strong Jewish community right where they find themselves.

In fact, during the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, when Jews who wished could return to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, many don’t leave. They had already established themselves in their new homes for many generations.

We in the church can also get caught up in a kind of “purity” seeking, a kind of “frozen chosen-ness.” Many of us look back to a time once heralded in the church as “good or better,” lamenting for what we believe we have lost.

We mourn what we think culture has “taken” from us. We lament that the church isn’t what it “used to be.”

Others of us look around at the foreign culture we find ourselves in today and resist putting down roots into what feels like a very different culture than what had been before, where Christianity and the church had the home court advantage.

Like the man sitting in the port, waiting for his ship to come in, our eyes are focused on the past so keenly, that we miss every opportunity we have in the present.

In the time our elderly gentleman spent waiting, he could have built his own ship. In the time we in the church have spent lamenting and complaining, we could have planted an entire vineyard of God.

Sometimes, we can get so caught up waiting for the future that we miss the beauty of today. Sometimes, we can get so caught up in lamenting the past that we can miss the mission God is calling us to do and the kind of disciples Jesus is calling us to become.

It’s time, to stop fearing our neighbors or perceiving them merely through their difference from us.

God calls the church to “put down roots” right where we are. God calls us to spend time prospering our communities. And in doing so, we too will prosper. The church prospers not by its own means. But by the providence of God.

“Not by power, not by might, but by the Spirit,” says the Lord.

No Church --God has not forgotten us. We have forgotten God.

We have forgotten the “call” of God to prosper our neighbors, to love our neighbors, right where we are and in the time we’ve been given.

We have forgotten to have faith in the power and providence of God to prosper Christ’s Holy Church in God’s own manner and in God’s own season.

We have forgotten to pray for our communities first, ourselves second, so that God might bless us through our willingness to be a blessing to others.

We have forgotten to have faith in the living Christ, who asks us to persevere in our prayers, despite our circumstances, or our past, or our worries, or our hesitations.

We have forgotten to let the Holy Spirit be our guide, and to trust in Jesus more than our own thoughts, plans, and opinions.

We have forgotten that our mission in the world is not for us to determine, but for God to determine for us.

We have forgotten that the past had its own problems, and issues, and dilemmas, and

we have let our fear of the future and our veneration of the past paralyze us in our present.

We have forgotten that it isn’t the role of a culture to align with the church, but the church’s role to be in mission to its people –all of its people. To get to know them. And to learn to love them.

Church of Today, don’t sit around waiting for your ship to come in. But start today building your boat.

A disciple ship.

A gospel ship.

The old Ship of Zion. And get ready for the adventure of your life!

God has not forgotten us! God has chosen us for such a time as this.

This is the adventure of being on God’s mission. It’s easy to till and keep our own traditions.

It’s much harder to plant seeds into unfamiliar soil. And yet this undoubtedly is our call.

Friends, seeking and finding, is a slow process that takes patience and a strong belief in the power of discovery. We must keep warming the heart with remembered glimpses or feelings of home.

It is also vital to have companions to share the journey with us for they give us both comfort and strength.

Discovering kinship or a desire to be like another gives us a sense of finding our way home. We feel as though we have found a part of ourselves.

It energizes us to keep searching. It's like driving down a dark street and seeing lights on in a house – we find comfort in knowing someone else has found a place to belong.

Knowing a vast emptiness and darkness on our inner journey, acknowledges a hollowness we live with.

A friend happened to be in a bookstore and saw a book about darkness. The book seemed to be calling to her. She bought it.

Reading the author's story of struggling with darkness, my friend found a new sense of hope. She had found someone who named her experience for her. She was not alone in her seeking.

Each of us has experienced long stretches of time when we catch glimpses of home ... which keeps us yearning for more.

We recognize that God always takes the initiative of seeking, placing a desire in our hearts to be found.

We need to keep ourselves available to be found and not hide in our fears ... or in our business ... or our ego-centeredness.

We need to rise above our pain or our anxieties and be more open to the love of one who yearns to help us find our way home.

Let those who have ears hear and respond to God's word. Amen.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Hymn

There's a Spirit in the Air

VU 582

Words: Brian Wren / Music: John Wilson

© 1979 Hope Publishing Company

There's a spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.'

Lose your shyness, find your tongue,
tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!

Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!

When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world.

Offering

How privileged we are that the creator, God, asks us to help bring life and hope, peace and justice, into reality. Our offerings are received with thanks.

Prayers of the People

Deep within our being where truth and peace yearn to reign over chaos and confusion ...

Among the people who come into our lives, our loved ones, our friends, our colleagues and companions, even our enemies –

When we feel empty, distraught, frustrated, and lost; when we wonder in what direction we should go ...

Thank you, God, for finding us.

When we have sensed your nearness and felt your beauty fill our consciousness ...

When the power of your goodness moved through our beings and made a difference in someone else's life ...

When we have been drawn to conversion, when we knew we had to change our hearts, to give ourselves over to you ...

When we look at our world, so full of pain and injustice, and felt a bonding with all who know pain and sorrow ...

You, God, are our treasure

You are worth the constant search for a glimpse of your truth and the touch of your love ...

You are strength in sorrow, hope in times of unhappiness, comfort in times of confusion, safe harbour in the storms of life ...

You are the home, the sacred place of goodness ...

You love us unconditionally and believe in us and wait for us to come home when we have been away ...

Hear the prayers of our hearts and bless those we lift up to you ...

Hear us as we pray as Jesus taught, saying ... Our Father ...

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

Take Up The Song

MV 213

Words and Music: © 2005 Laura A. Herman

Take up the song of peace
and go into the world,
Take up the song of peace
in ev'ry moment.
In ev'ry moment of the journey,
we're laying down our lives,
lay them down, in peace,
lay them down, and take up the song.

Take up the song of hope
and go into the world,
Take up the song of hope
in ev'ry moment.
In ev'ry moment of the journey,
we're laying down our lives,
lay them down, in hope,
lay them down, and take up the song.

Take up the song of faith
and go into the world,
Take up the song of faith
in ev'ry moment.
In ev'ry moment of the journey,
we're laying down our lives,
lay them down, in faith,
lay them down, and take up the song.

Take up the song of love
and go into the world,

Take up the song of love
in ev'ry moment.
In ev'ry moment of the journey,
we're laying down our lives,
lay them down, in love,
lay them down, and take up the song.

Benediction & Commissioning

God keeps us on the path that leads home and gives us the courage
To do what is best for healing the heart of the world.

We go, knowing we are not alone, God goes with us! Amen.

Postlude

It Fell Upon a Summer Day

Music: Henry W. Davies

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Birchcliff Bluffs United Church
Year C – Tenth after Pentecost
Additional Lectionary

Isaiah 5:1-7

New Revised Standard Version

The Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard

5 Let me sing for my beloved
a love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
² He dugged it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge, I pray you, between me
and my vineyard.

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵ And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.

⁶ I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briars and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, a cry!

Psalm 80:1-2

New Revised Standard Version

Prayer for Israel's Restoration

80 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
thou who leadest Joseph like a flock!
Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
² before E'phraim and Benjamin and Manas'seh!
Stir up thy might,
and come to save us!

Psalm 80:8-19

New Revised Standard Version

⁸ Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt;
thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.
⁹ Thou didst clear the ground for it;

it took deep root and filled the land.
¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
 the mighty cedars with its branches;
¹¹ it sent out its branches to the sea,
 and its shoots to the River.
¹² Why then hast thou broken down its walls,
 so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it,
 and all that move in the field feed on it.

¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts!
 Look down from heaven, and see;
 have regard for this vine,
¹⁵ the stock which thy right hand planted.^[a]
¹⁶ They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
 may they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance!
¹⁷ But let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand,
 the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself!
¹⁸ Then we will never turn back from thee;
 give us life, and we will call on thy name!

¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God of hosts!
 let thy face shine, that we may be saved!

Hebrews 11:29 **New Revised Standard Version**

The Faith of Other Israelite Heroes

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

Hebrews 12:2 **New Revised Standard Version**

² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Luke 12:49-56 **New Revised Standard Version**

Jesus the Cause of Division

⁴⁹ “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they will be divided:

father against son
and son against father,
mother against daughter
and daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Interpreting the Time

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain,’ and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”