



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 21st, 2022

WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE

Prelude

Walk In The Light

Music: A.H. Brown

Call to Worship

... there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart. Jeremiah 20:9

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

Opening Prayer

God of passionate life, who sends the sparks, who lights the inner blaze and tends the flame, fill us with your radiance.

Enkindle us with your love. Touch us with your goodness so that we will be the kindling of your generous compassion. May the truth we seek and accept shine through all we are and do. Come, stir us up we pray. Amen.

Opening Hymn

Come and Seek The Ways of Wisdom

MV 10

Words: Ruth Duck / Music: Donna Kasbohm
Words © 1996 and Music © 1997 The Pilgrim Press

Come and seek the ways of Wisdom,
she who danced when earth was new.

Follow closely what she teaches,
for her words are right and true.
Wisdom clears the path to justice,
Showing us what love must do.

Listen to the voice of Wisdom,
crying in the market-place.
Hear the Word made flesh among us,
full of glory, truth, and grace.
When the word takes root and ripens,
peace and righteousness embrace.

Sister Wisdom, come, assist us;
nurture all who seek rebirth.
Spirit guide and close companion,
bring to light our sacred worth.
Free us to become your people,
holy friends of God and earth.

Reading:

I wanted it. Desired it greatly. Yearned for its coming.
But when it did come I fought, resisted, ran, hid away.,
I said, "Go home!"

I didn't know the fire of God could be more than a gentle glow
Or a cozy consolation.

I didn't know it could come as a blaze.

A wildfire uncontrolled, searing my soul, chasing my old ways,
Smoking them out.

Only when I stopped running, gave up the chase, surrendered,
Did I know the fire's flaming as consolation and joy.

Only then could I welcome the One whose fire
Had I long sought. - *Joyce Rupp*

Scripture Reading

Jeremiah 20:9 - 13

⁹But if I say, "I will not mention his word
or speak anymore in his name,"
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.

All my friends
are waiting for me to slip,

¹¹ But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior;
so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.
They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced;
their dishonor will never be forgotten.

¹² LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous
and probe the heart and mind,
let me see your vengeance on them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

¹³ Sing to the LORD!
Give praise to the LORD!
for He rescues the life of the needy

Hymn

God Prepare Me

MV 18

Words and Music: John W. Thompson and Randy Scruggs
© 1982 Whole Armor & Full Armor Publishing Co.

God, prepare me to be a sanctuary,
pure and holy tried and true; with thanksgiving,
I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

God, prepare me to be a sanctuary,
pure and holy tried and true; with thanksgiving,
I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

Sermon Hearts On Fire

Sitting before a campfire on a cool evening can be a very contemplative experience. The flames dance on the logs and light up the night. The bright, dynamic light of the fire can draw me into a quiet reverie.

I find it easy to enter into the vibrancy of the flames with their sudden spurts of energy and sparks of life. Awesome and surprise fill my heart when another piece of wood is placed on the glowing embers and new flames suddenly fill the darkness with radiant light.

Jeremiah uses the image of fire with its intense light and penetrating heat to describe the presence of God within him. This dance of God is a burning, searing, powerful, passionate presence, a fire that kindles and transforms.

Jeremiah did not welcome this flame of God within him. It seemed too much for him. He fought its being there and even accused God of seducing him.

In spite of his loud protestations, Jeremiah did act on the dynamic burning in his heart. He surrendered to the flame of God and allowed the love within him to fill him with a passion for truth and justice. His voice blazed with God's word.

At times we might feel like Jeremiah in his initial resistance to the blaze of God within him. The fire can be too demanding. We might be fearful of getting too involved with God or afraid that this closeness could ask us to change our lives. Yet, the true disciple of Jesus is required to have a heart on fire with God: your light must shine in people's sight ...

Sometimes the fire in our hearts does indeed cause pain – it can lead us where we do not want to go. Yet the fire is meant to transform us ... just as wood is turned to flame ... as candle wax is consumed ... as oil in a lantern is burned. We are the fuel for God's work on earth.

Unlike Jeremiah, other people in scripture welcomed the fire in their heart. Such were the two on the road to Emmaus. So deep was their sadness until they encountered Jesus and their flame was sparked again.

Throughout scriptures fire is used to symbolize the divine presence. Moses approaches the fire of the burning bush and hears the call to free his people. Isaiah's mouth is purified by red hot coals... The Exodus travellers knew the pillar of fire by night ... Peter writes that the fire of God is a source of purification. And the trembling, fearful followers of Jesus received the fire of courage when tongues of fire came over their heads in the Upper Room.

In reflecting on these passages, I begin to see such people are courageous, truth-seekers, willing to stand up for what they believe. They recognize that God gifts them and works through them. This transformation is seared and purified by the struggles and heartaches of life.

No two hearts are on fire with God in the same way. Because of our own inner battles, we resist the fire or fear its power. Many of the people whose hearts are shaped by the fire of God are those we meet day after day. Their goodness and values are caught by those whose paths they cross.

They are business people who live lives of integrity and honesty. They are missionaries who give their all to help educate and give medical treatment ... healthcare workers who are patient, kind, in touch and word. When we are with people who leave us with a sense of being touched by some goodness that we did not expect, but that blesses us ... it is the fire of God.

While the fire of God dances quietly greatly in most lives, there are some in whom the fire crackles and pops – moving the person to raise a strong voice in protest. These are the Jeremiahs in our world. They risk all to free society from the bondage of falsehood, violence and greed.

So, how do we keep the love of God aflame in us? How do we stoke the fires of our enthusiasm and passion for spiritual growth?

Each time we pray, we draw near to the heart of God and light a candle in our heart. We do not know the day or time when the spark will burst into a great fire. But little by little it influences our life and participation in the human family.

As the fire of God dances in us, we will become more generous with our forgiveness and more daring in our action for a justice that will heal the world.

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

Hymn

As a Fire Is Meant for Burning

VU 578

Words: Ruth Duck / Music: Marty Haugen
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As a fire is meant for burning
with a bright and warming flame,
so the church is meant for mission,
giving glory to God's name.
Not to preach our creeds or customs,
but to build a bridge of care,
we join hands across the nations,
finding neighbours everywhere.

We are learners; we are teachers;
we are pilgrims on the way.
We are seekers; we are givers;
we are vessels made of clay.
By our gentle, loving actions,
we would show that Christ is light.
In a humble, listening Spirit,
we would live to God's delight.

As a green bud in the springtime
is a sign of life renewed,
so may we be signs of oneness
mid earth's peoples, many-hued.
As a rainbow lights the heavens
when a storm is past and gone,
may our lives reflect the radiance
of God's new and glorious dawn.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Offering

Let us pause to remember the kindling of God in our lives as we offer a portion of what we have to help others.

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 feel 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 each 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

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

VU 575

African-American Spiritual

I'm gonna live so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna live so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna work so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna work so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna pray so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna pray so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna sing so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

I'm gonna sing so God can use me
anywhere, now, anytime!

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

Perhaps It Sounds

(Glaubensstimme)

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