

## **May 17, 2020 – Sixth Sunday of Easter**

**A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our eleventh online worship service, during the time of church closure due to COVID. Today's service again includes music from Brad, and our meditation focuses on the lectionary reading Acts.**

**I share with you the sad news of a congregational death. Dorothy Bezanson, beloved wife, mother, grandmother and relative to a number of our St Peter's family passed away peacefully on May 3, 2020. We extend our thanks to Sunnyside Home and our love to Dorothy's family. Please keep the family in your prayers.**

**During this past week, there have been many items in the news about re-opening and what that will mean. On Monday May 11<sup>th</sup>, the Grand River Ministry Area clergy met with Bishop Michael, Assistant Bishop Doug and our Synod Secretary, Wendell. We discussed some of the things that are emerging as best practice recommendations for return to gatherings for worship. One of the precautions we know we will have to consider is safe practice when it comes to singing. Brad shared with me this link, which I think gives us a good sense of some of the risks related to congregational singing at this time:**

<https://www.pressherald.com/?p=5419178>

**Reflective of this reality, I will begin including more instrumental pieces and less sung hymnody in these services, so that we begin to become accustomed to listening worshipfully rather than singing. Please know it is fine for you to sing at home – but when we gather we have to remain mindful of how singing into our shared air puts us collectively at higher risk.**

**It will be normal for you to have concerns for your safety and health as restrictions get lifted. We know that post-lockdown does not mean post-COVID, since COVID will still be around and we will still need to be very careful and take many safety precautions. If you want to talk with me about how the thought of returning to "things being open" might be affecting you, please get in touch – via church phone 519-653-4721, text or cell call 519-588-7701 or by email [pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org](mailto:pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org) ... talking about our anxieties is one of the best ways for us to overcome them, if not lay them to rest.**

**Remember also to reach out by telephone, email or facebook if you need a friendly phone call or a screen door visit. And please remain connected with each other by telephone – make it your goal this week to call at least one person every day for a telephone visit. You will be blessed, and will be a blessing in the process ☺**

**- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.**

**Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart,  
centre yourself for worship.**

**Prelude: Brad on piano from church – "Stay with Us"**

**Click here: [https://youtu.be/J\\_67Uu7hBsc](https://youtu.be/J_67Uu7hBsc)**

### **Greeting**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.**

**Prayer of the Day:**

***Sovereign God, you hold together everything – in heaven and on earth. Lead us in our focus on you: your love, your example in Jesus, your instructions to us as disciples. Receive our prayers, please, and give us the Spirit of your truth and peace. Guide us as we prepare to re-enter life in community so that we are guided by love first and foremost. Amen***

**The Lesson: 1 Peter 3:13-22**

If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that *they're* the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God. He went and proclaimed God's salvation to earlier generations who ended up in the prison of judgement because they wouldn't listen. You know, even though God waited patiently all the days that Noah built his ship, only a few were saved then, eight to be exact—saved *from* the water *by* the water. The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus' resurrection before God with a clear conscience. Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He's standing right alongside God, and what he says goes. [The Message Translation]

Word of God, word of life. ***C: Thanks be to God.***

**The Holy Gospel according to John 14:15-21.**

***C: Glory to you O Lord.***

"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be *in* you!

"I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and you're in me, and I'm in you.

"The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and make myself plain to him." [The Message Translation]

The Gospel of our Lord. ***C: Praise to you, O Christ.\****

**Psalm 66 and Psalm 137**(reading homework)

### **Acclamation of the Word** with visuals of our church windows:

"How Beautiful Are the Feet of Him from Handel's Messiah featuring Julianne Binkies, soprano, Barbara Burden, alto, and Bradley Moggach, piano. The piece was recorded in 2009 for the 175th anniversary of our congregation. It was part of a CD created for the occasion entitled, Remember, Rejoice, Renew."

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rm9bAUffHK4&feature=youtu.be>

### **The Reading: Acts 17:22-29**

So Paul took his stand in the open space at the Areopagus and laid it out for them. "It is plain to see that you Athenians take your religion seriously. When I arrived here the other day, I was fascinated with all the shrines I came across. And then I found one inscribed, to the god nobody knows. I'm here to introduce you to this God so you can worship intelligently, know who you're dealing with.

"The God who made the world and everything in it, this Master of sky and land, doesn't live in custom-made shrines or need the human race to run errands for him, as if he couldn't take care of himself. He makes the creatures; the creatures don't make him. Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually *find* him. He doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. He's not remote; he's *near*. We live and move in him, can't get away from him! One of your poets said it well: 'We're the God-created.' Well, if we are the God-created, it doesn't make a lot of sense to think we could hire a sculptor to chisel a god out of stone for *us*, does it? [The Message Translation]

Word of God, word of life. ***C: Thanks be to God.***

### **Meditation (imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here):**

This week I grappled with the questions and worries of "How might we return to congregational worship gatherings safely?" We learnt from the Bishop's office that, in the Maritimes, where infection rates are considerably less, and things are re-opening, considerations for worship gatherings have included these:

- No singing in group gatherings for another 12-18 months.
- Not more than 10 people gathered at a time in church.
- No attendees above the age of 60 (recommended not mandated)
- Log for contact tracing in the event of outbreak
- No meals/refreshments.
- No communion unless full PPE is being used by server
- No service lasting longer than an hour
- Complete sanitization after EACH use of bathroom

When the assistant to the Bishop, Rev Doug Reble told us these things in our video conference call, I felt my heart sinking. I grappled so hard that my heart actually hurt.

How will it feel like worship when we cannot sing together?

The words of the song “By The Rivers of Babylon” (from Psalm 137) came to me.

The context we find ourselves in is very different from the context of Psalm 137. That Psalm references a time when the Jewish people were held in captivity in Babylon, and were asked by their captors to sing their worship songs not for the purpose of worship or celebrating God, but for the sake of the mirth of the captors.

The Psalmist asks the question, “how can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

We are not held captive by empire builders, as was the case of the Babylonian captivity. But we have, these nine long weeks, been held captive by a now-familiar looking virus: COVID-19. We are in a strange pandemic land, and the rules of engagement with this captor require for us to worship and celebrate God’s sovereignty and might in different ways.

Change is hardly ever easy, and change from something that is comfortable, known and familiar brings with it many side-effects. Grief is one of these: the grief and loss of what we were used to. I miss seeing everyone, I miss the hugs when we share the peace, I miss being able to hold a hand or touch someone for comfort, I miss sharing communion with all of you, and God in heaven knows I miss singing with everyone so very much. I sing along with youtube videos, I sing in the shower, I sing while I work in the garden but none of these comes close to when we sing together with Brad or John on the organ or piano. None of this comes close to hearing our beloved choir sing.

Change is hard. Unspeakably hard.

And I am about to say something that may be even harder, so please brace yourself.

Change is hard and keeping the baby while throwing out some bathwater sometimes can feel harder.

Let me explain:

As much as I love each one of you, as much as I love our gatherings for worship, as much as I love our singing and our church,

**the one I worship is the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

Worship of God and the love of God is our baby.

All the rest is bathwater.

Lovely, comfortable, known, familiar and soothing bathwater – but bathwater, nonetheless.

We are called to have faith in God, to set aside time for our relationship with God, and to worship God – and nowhere does it say in our scriptures that this must be done with organ and piano, with Brad and Pastor present, with hymns we sing together from hymnals, surrounded by beautiful stained glass, and a red carpet running down the centre aisle, seated in pews (as far from the front as possible – yes I know those back pews are sorely missed).

Even Jesus, when he is sharing the last supper, invites the disciples to “do this in remembrance of me”. Jesus does not specify: train people for a number of years in seminary, ordain them if they meet standards of discernment, and have them and only them preside over communion so that you can “do this in remembrance of me”.

Jesus, in scripture, invites us to remember him – his body broken for us – in the bread that we share.

Jesus, in scripture, invites us to remember him – the blood he shed for the forgiveness of all our sins – in the wine that we share.

We have built an entire ecclesiastical tradition, or an entire tradition of church, around the scriptures and the things which we hear tell of in the scriptures – and it is important to identify what we have chiseled out, over millennia as traditions. It is important for us to discern that which is chiseled out by humankind, and what God asks of us in that most important commandment:

love God with all your heart and soul ...

and that second most important commandment: love your neighbour as you love yourself.

I want to be very clear – we have traditions and practices that we love and that we are used to AND the worship of God and the love of God requires two members: you and God. It requires one key element: LOVE.

Everything else: bathwater.

I do not say this to be heretic or to knock the traditions of our church.

I do not say this to dis-respect or ignore your individual relationships which, for some of you, span generations, at St Peter’s Lutheran Church in Cambridge. I say this as your spiritual leader and pastor, in a time when our captor, the COVID pandemic, might make a mirth-ful distraction of our desire to stick to traditions.

When you have to choose between:

- sticking to tradition and putting yourself at risk in order to keep worshipping together,

versus

- worshipping together with many changes to our worship norms, in even twos and threes, where scriptures tell us, God's Spirit will ALWAYS join us – pick worship over tradition.

Pick a safe practice of worship and do not throw out worship because it doesn't fit the familiarity of traditions. Keep the baby and be willing to give up some bathwater. We will grieve the loss of comfort together, and we will negotiate our way safely through these changes together.

In the reading from the book of Acts today, we hear Paul reminding people who take their religion very seriously, that "The God who made the world and everything in it, this Master of sky and land, doesn't live in custom-made shrines or need the human race to run errands for him, as if he couldn't take care of himself. He makes the creatures; the creatures don't make him. Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually *find* him. He doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. He's not remote; he's *near*"

God is NEAR.

And for you to draw close to God all that is required is your will and your intention and your desire to be close to God. When you have that hunger and you express it in your worship, you could be in a lightless cave in the bowels of the earth but God is with YOU.

When we return to that basic truth, then we can begin to see everything else as an add-on.

The music, the hymns, being able to gather together as one big gathering – these are like the things you add to the burger, the "would you like fries with that", the "would you like to make that a meal", but the most essential of our spiritual sustenance comes from God meeting us in our hunger for God.

Today I encourage you to hold this hunger as your first priority as we move forward in determining how we can safely resume worship when isolation is no longer mandated – we do not have to wait for churches and worship settings to be allowed to re-open – we can worship in twos and threes, safely, and know that our worship leaders will be available to guide us through this process. God will reveal greater things to us in this faithful journey.

Remember, most importantly, God is NEAR. And God will be with us as we journey through this strange land.

Amen.

**Hymn of the Day** – By the Rivers of Babylon (The Melodians)

**Click here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXf1j8Hz2bU>

### **Thanksgiving for our Presence on this Land.**

We thank you God, for granting our existence on this safe, bountiful, land, and we recognize that we thrive here and enjoy life on the traditional territories of the Anishnabe, Neutral and Haudenosaunee people. **Amen.**

**While you listen to the offertory song, continue your prayers with the words of the song, and consider how you may be a blessing in the coming week.**

**Offertory** – Christ, Unser Herr, zum Jordan Kam featuring Bradley Moggach, Organ  
**Click here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=130056ZPESE&feature=youtu.be>

### **Offering Prayer**

God of all abundance, receive our brokenness and the offering of our lives. Take us, who return to you in thanksgiving: form us and shape us into a love like Jesus, so that we may be love for this broken world. **Amen.**

**(please remember to send an offering to the church if you are able)**

**Prayers of Intercession** (Adapted from prayers prepared by Pastor Joanna Miller)

Loving God, in these days, when it feels like we're living out the realities of Holy Week like never before, keep reminding us that the story doesn't end with death, or waiting. Help us to believe that something new and wonderful will emerge from this; fill us up with hopeful expectation for what will come. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We are seeing reports, God, of drastic drops in the levels of emissions and pictures of the ways that life is re-emerging. Help us to be inspired by these stories and pictures, that we might become even more committed to the work of caring for this planet we inhabit and for all the creatures who share it with us. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the decision makers, O God. For our political leaders, that they lead according to the best information to keep as many of our neighbours as safe as possible. For the scientists, who are working so hard to understand what is happening and for the ones who work hard for a vaccine. For the business leaders who are responsible for the care of their workers. For the health care providers, who run towards the fire and accept the risk in the name of serving others. For the parents, who struggle to find a balance between work and play, screens and fresh air. Give them all your wisdom and compassion. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are affected by violence during these days, whether it is the plague of domestic violence, or the terrible realities of physical and gun violence. We especially uphold in our prayers, the family and loved ones of those who died in Nova Scotia. We remember those who are hurting, loved ones to both the shot and the

shooter, and we ask you to walk with them Jesus. To bring your peace and comfort to them, in the midst of this random, mysterious grief. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those in Fort McMurray who have had to be evacuated due to flooding. We ask your strength and your presence with them as they journey through difficult times again, so soon after the fires they endured a few years ago. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the vulnerable in our midst. For those whose suffering began long before we heard of COVID-19. For those whose mental health is suffering. For those who are in the midst of treatments and diagnoses and for all who are medically fragile. Be with each one, send them your healing, be present with them. We pray especially for those we name either silently or aloud. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks for all the saints that have gone before us, whose faith reminds us to hold on in the midst of fear and unknown. Bless all those in your presence and all who will die this day. Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

All these things, Lord, we entrust to your care, knowing that you hear all of our prayers. And we pray in the way that Jesus taught us to pray:

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, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

**Sending Hymn: Lay Me Low (Brad on vocals and Piano)**

Click here: <https://youtu.be/YtOKV85Rk1w>

**Blessing:**

May God bless us and keep us.

May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.

May God look upon us with favor

and give us ☩ peace.

**Amen.**

**Dismissal:**

Go in Peace, Go in Hope. **Thanks be to God. \***

**Notices about church in time of COVID-19:**



- The Public Health & Provincially mandated closure of churches continues through June 2<sup>nd</sup> (at the earliest). We will continue to keep you updated on Facebook, via website and by telephone, as we are able. Although the church building is closed, voicemail is checked regularly at 519-653-4721 the church number or 519-588-7701 Pastor. Please call if you need a pastoral telephone visit, or if we can help in any way. It is impossible for Pastor to call everyone in turn, so she is relying on you to reach out if you need a call.
- You will find this worship service most helpful if you read the sections out loud at home ☺ And sing along ☺ Brad also recommends looking up other lyric videos that pop up - Glory to God at home ☺
- As far as possible, the regular work of the church continues. Lay leaders are meeting using online meeting tools. In the past week, church council met. This past week, the Risk Management Ministry Team has communicated via email to work on our safety protocols for when we return to worshipping together at church. We will follow up in the coming week. Our goal is to share information and be "ready to roll" when COVID lockdown is over.
- Bonnie Scott continues to prepare and share information as widely as possible for those who do not have internet access. Brad continues to come in and practice and record. Pastor continues to visit, via telephone, to accompany however possible, and to prepare worship materials. Alex continues to bear the responsibility of treasurer and reminds us that buying and selling maple syrup is a good way to occupy our time ☺
- Thank you for accessing this Sixth Sunday of Easter service. When we re-open, we will have our Easter service in community.
- Please stay in touch with each other. Call each other. Visit on the telephone, and where safe, through closed glass doors, and across fences. Let us know how we can help if you are shut in but need groceries or something delivered. Keep safe, and keep on praying. Think of this time as our time in the tomb, with our Saviour, from which we will be delivered soon ☺ Call Pastor if you need to talk, because she cannot possibly call everyone ☺
- May God bless you and keep you safe ...