

May 24, 2020 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our twelfth online worship service, during the time of church closure due to COVID. Brad and Lorre have been hard at work putting together a combination of music and photos, so please take the time to meditate on the musical offerings provided via Youtube. Our meditation focuses on the lectionary reading from the book Acts, from the May 21st lectionary.

During this past week a few places have re-opened, and I understand from many that careful visits to cottages and boats have begun. Remember that, as things are opened up, the COVID-19 virus remains alive and well, and for us to likewise remain alive and well, precautions are advised: safe distancing, avid handwashing, and polite consideration of and respect for the fears of others are, at this time, acts of love.

Please exercise these acts of love generously.

When church does re-open for worship gatherings, it seems likely that singing will be greatly limited (<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 may put us collectively at higher risk.

It will be normal for you to have concerns for your safety and health as restrictions get lifted. 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 ... 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, driveway, porch or deck visit. 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 Organ from “Remember, Rejoice, Renew”
2 Dialogue Sur Les Grands Jeux

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHX0ZSwsF0Y&list=PL9km5c7GxbOAJVRBWu6xiTQEsHGKGcobJ&index=2>

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:

Unknowable God, you remain a mystery and yet you reveal yourself to us. In your son, Jesus, you dwell in our midst, you suffer the agony of mortal death, you give us witness of resurrection, and with your blessing, take your leave, returning to heaven. You make a journey which makes an eternal journey possible for us. Help us to have strong faith, in your goodness and mercy, in the midst of your unfathomable, infinite knowing. Help us to trust in your all-knowing as greater than our partial knowing. We pray for this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen

The Holy Gospel according to Luke 24:44-53.**C: Glory to you O Lord.**

Then he said, "Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled."

He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way. He said, "You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from Jerusalem! You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses. What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you're equipped with power from on high."

He then led them out of the city over to Bethany. Raising his hands he blessed them, and while blessing them, took his leave, being carried up to heaven.

And they were on their knees, worshiping him. They returned to Jerusalem bursting with joy. They spent all their time in the Temple praising God. Yes. [The Message Translation]

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

Psalm 47 (reading homework)**Acclamation of the Word:**

"Morning Star" 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." We often sing this song following baptisms at church ☺

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNWav0cgSJc&list=PL9km5c7GxbOAJVRBWu6xiTQEsHGKGcobJ&index=10>

The Reading: Acts 1:1-11.

Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said good-bye to the apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to

them about things concerning the kingdom of God. As they met and ate meals together, he told them that they were on no account to leave Jerusalem but “must wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me. John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon.”

When they were together for the last time they asked, “Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?”

He told them, “You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.”

These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, “You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.” [The Message Translation]

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

Meditation (imagine Pastor Janaki’s voice here):

What do re-purposing bathwater, crossing from here to there and good size rocks have in common? Well, they may give us some insight into negotiating our way into the unknown future – a future very much like the future faced by the disciples when the resurrected Jesus “poof” – ascended into heaven.

When Jesus, post-resurrection, ascended into heaven, they were left asking “what next”, and looking up at an empty sky. These days we might similarly ask: what happens to our Christian witness, what next, when we look upon our locked church doors, when we look upon closed business places, when we look at unemployment rates and the prospect of return to school ... how do we get from “here” to the “there” we want to get to? How do we establish new normal and live a vibrant witness of our faith?

Let me take you through these visuals that may help spark our imaginations.

Last week, in a somewhat anxious and worried state, I wrote a meditation about not throwing out the baby (our relationship WITH God) with the bathwater (the familiar and comfortable way in which we have become used to worship gatherings in our sanctuary). A number of you sent me feedback on the message, and it was clear from the feedback that those who responded got it: the new normal for worship will be very different. The new normal for life post-COVID-lockdown will be very different ... and a few people wondered and asked with me, “How do we get from here to there?” Our faithful work right now includes figuring this out gently, respectfully.

One lovely note I got told a story of two small children: a baby and a pre-schooler, who, during a very scorching summer, when water restrictions were in effect, were bathed. Their mom, after bath time, would carefully bail the bathwater...this is how she described it.

"After all were dried and swaddled and rocked and tucked, I would return to that tub, bucket in hand. I bailed that baby's bathwater, left the warm comfort of that sometimes chaotic but always intimately personal family time, and exited to the exterior of my home. I did not pull the plug and send that baby's bathwater down the drain. I re-purposed it. The water was poured into the containers and gardens and onto the lawn in the front of my home. That baby's bathwater nurtured and fed life outside my home. The colour of the flowers always gave me a bit of joy as I was returning from a stroller walk or playing on the front lawn. Perhaps passers-by appreciated it too.

My neighbour tells me that her favourite parenting phrase of mine is, "We're not raising grass, we're raising children". The babies were obviously the priority and the focus of my intense love. But nor did the bathwater get thrown out. It was changed. It promoted life. It helped others see the beauty of the Creator.

God is using this time. We may not see it until hindsight is 2020. New things will emerge from the struggle. That undefined spiritual yearning that I have sensed in so many unchurched people these last few years may well be defined. Our St. Peters Community will be forced to do some soul-searching and the Spirit will be there. With." (Quoted with permission from Bonnie Berg)

One approach to getting from where we are to the time when we will again gather for worship is to consider: what is the most critical baby? What is the bathwater? And how might we re-purpose the bathwater with our Christian calls to witness and stewardship in mind. How can we ensure that things are done well, in a way that glorifies God and honours our individual experiences of fear, caution and health conditions?

The second image I want to share with you comes from a hike I used to do regularly in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica. This hike involved crossing a river that had no bridge where the trail met the river. The waters were variably shallow and deep. There were boulders and rocks strewn all throughout the river and on its banks. Many of my friends with whom I hiked had mountain goat genes, I am sure, in that they seemed able to hop nimbly from rock to rock with no fear.

Me, I would look from the rock I was on to the next rock, a leap a way, and try to do the math on the length of my legs and the hypotenuse length of my leap! In my mind there was no way my relatively short legs could make that leap and I would imagine myself slipping and sliding into the water, perhaps cracking my skull on a rock in the fall, and I would be scared.

On one particular hike, one of my less mountain goat-like friends apparently also had reservations about the length of his legs – but was not incapacitated by fear like I was. He

simply took a good size rock, placed it in the water between the two rocks that presented what felt like too wide of a leap, and then had a stepping-stone via which he could cross the too wide leap length. A calm, anxiety-free solution to a leap that was too big to make without fear.

This wise friend taught me that sometimes, the leap from here to there is made gentler and safer by putting a stepping-stone in the middle, thereby making baby steps out of one big giant step that seems impossible to make and remain whole.

When we look to Jesus' leave-taking conversation with the disciples, we hear Jesus asked: "Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?"

Naturally, the disciples are anxious when Jesus starts talking about leaving them, and baptism of the Holy Spirit. Whilst Jesus is trying to assure and reassure them that they will be covered, all they can think about is restoration ... when will things go back to the way they should be? It is another way of asking our constant question these days: when will things go back to normal? When will things go back to the way they should be ... or the way we are used to?

Jesus' response to them is also a response for us, in our context today: "You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses ..."

Timing is the Father's business. We don't have to get up into the bosses business! We don't have to know the play by play plan God has. Because we are given an advocate, one who will accompany us on this walk: the Holy Spirit. And by this same Spirit, leaps that we may not feel equipped in faith to take, will become passable by placing some kind of stepping-stone in the gap, so that our leap, our giant leaps become sequences of manageable baby steps that are made manageable by faith, and this faith not supplied by our own machinations but supplied by God, in, with and through the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, we will be those stepping-stones for each other – living stones by which the journey is made safely to the other side.

I think it is entirely possible for us to be living in the season of Lent, basking in the resurrection of Easter, and on the starting-blocks of ignition with Pentecost fire all at the same time. These days sometimes I wake with a full head of energy, and a huge plan for the day, but after breakfast and a shower a nap is needed. We are scrunched into our discipleship, all balled up right now, waiting to be sprung in some senses, already sprung in other senses, and still living in the dark season of loss as well. This is ok ... like a powerful river, this time has wide spots of shallow waters, and deep spots of rushing waters – and God is with us to help us make the crossing in every moment that we trust enough to call upon God's presence, power and grace. Amen.

Hymn of the Day – Deep River (From St Peter's "Remember, Rejoice, Renew)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO587yGo6uc&list=PL9km5c7GxbOAJVRBWu6xiTQEsHGKGcobJ&index=20>

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 – The Day you gave us Lord has ended featuring Bradley Moggach, Piano

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8rldVkwGXk>

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: Be Thou My Vision (Brad on Organ – words included)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvNjGlp6K5M>

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 2nd (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.
- 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 Seventh Sunday of Easter Sunday 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 ...