

May 3 2020 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our ninth online worship service, during the time of church closure due to COVID. Today, you get to hear Brad on the church organ for the Prelude. Our service focuses on the Acts reading and what it holds to inform our current contextual reality.

This Sunday is also known in the church tradition as “Good Shepherd Sunday”, with Psalm 23 and the Gospel reading reminding us that God and Jesus serve as our good shepherd, guiding us when we might go astray and keeping us safely, regardless of circumstances. We will honour this theme with much of our hymnody today.

We continue our link to a sung Lord’s Prayer in Swahili, “Baba Yetu”.

We also open with a very special recorded prelude from Brad’s own hands on our own organ 😊 Brad provided this background on the piece: Luther wrote the hymn text (*Christ, Unser Herr, zum Jordan Kam*) focused on baptism as part of his teaching about Lutheran concepts, possibly the last hymn he wrote. Luther held sermons about baptism in the Easter week of 1540; it seems likely that he wrote the hymn in that context.

As we read about thousands being baptized at a time in the book of Acts, this serves as a most appropriate prelude piece, and re-connects us with Brad’s gifts which have always been the best facilitator for worship in our gatherings for me 😊 Thank you Brad 😊

Remember 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 organ
Click here: <https://youtu.be/130056ZPESE>**

Gathering Hymn: The Lord’s My Shepherd (Stuart Townsend)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>

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:

God you are our shepherd: our guide, our protector and the one who gathers us together into safety. May we learn and grow in our awe and trust in you, so that our days might reflect the love of Jesus, our Redeemer and Way-maker, a love we share with others. Amen

The Lesson: 1 Peter 2:18-25

You who are servants, be good servants to your masters—not just to good masters, but also to bad ones. What counts is that you put up with it for God’s sake when you’re treated badly for no good reason. There’s no particular virtue in accepting punishment that you well deserve. But if you’re treated badly for good behavior and continue in spite of it to be a good servant, that is what counts with God.

This is the kind of life you’ve been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step.

He never did one thing wrong,
Not once said anything amiss.

They called him every name in the book and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, content to let God set things right. He used his servant body to carry our sins to the Cross so we could be rid of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing. You were lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you’re named and kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls. [The Message Translation]

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

Psalm 23 (represented in hymnody) **Shepherd me O God (Marty Haugen)**

Click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g_hROZbQV8

The Holy Gospel according to John 10:1-10.

C: Glory to you O Lord.

“Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he’s up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won’t follow a stranger’s voice but will scatter because they aren’t used to the sound of it.”

Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. “I’ll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone

who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. [The Message Translation]

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

Acclamation of the Word with visuals of our church windows:

"How Beautiful Are the Feet of Him from Handel's Messiah featuring Julianne Bintakies, 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 2:41-47

That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met.

They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. [The Message Translation]

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

Sermon (imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here):

This service was prepared for Sunday May 3rd, and as I write the sermon, I realize that by this Sunday it will have been seven full weeks since we met together at church for worship. I hope that many of you have gathered, whether you live on your own, with a partner, or with family, I hope that you would have gathered around a table or living room to listen to the hymns, to pray the prayers together, to read the readings and join in on the meditations here.

During these seven weeks, I have thought to myself many, many (like uncountable times), I wonder if this is an opportunity for a spiritual (re-)awakening for us to the richness to be found in small group gathering and worship. For example, our regular Monday afternoon Bible Study, or our evening Animate study give us a small group of people, usually not more than seven to ten people, who together grapple with ideas and events presented through Biblical

story. We pray before and afterwards ... and I venture to guess that if someone braver than I took the lead, we could easily include a song or songs of worship with our study time. I always leave those sessions feeling energized. Sometimes I am perplexed by the variety of interpretations: after all, there is something within most of us which makes us feel our interpretation is the most appropriate and best. But the energized feeling is always there regardless of variety of opinions. I think that is the energy granted by Spirit, which accompanies us in a strengthened way when we have really entered into conversation with the Word of God, through our discussions together. This is very different from our model of big gathering Sunday worship, where I (or the preacher for the day) preach, and reception may be more passive. A few of you have even confided in me that you take that time for a wee nap – the sabbath day is after all for rest too 😊

I think that energy is there because we gather in love as a small group, and I think it is there because the Word of God places that love in our centre. From that centre of love, everything else ensues. So, we gather and we grapple. And to bring this rambling back home to you 😊 I do wonder whether you are having such discussions (or meditations if you are alone) during this seven week opportunity to worship at home – because if you are, you might have a better understanding of what the folks in this chapter of Acts are experiencing.

If you have been following the worship instructions, you would have read over chapter two of the book of the Acts of the Apostles twice. It is believed that this book was written by the same author as the gospel of St Luke. And if you remember, Luke's gospel includes many stories which the other gospels do not include: the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, and the narrative of the criminal on the cross beside Jesus – all of these occur only in the gospel of Luke (along with others).

Acts Chapter 1 recaps Jesus' ascension, and the process for electing a replacement disciple for Judas who betrayed Jesus to the authorities. Chapter 2 recounts the day of Pentecost, and Peter preaches a rousing sermon, citing the prophecy of Joel from the Hebrew scriptures as foretelling the day of Pentecost ... and his closing movement in his sermon, according to Acts 2:38-40 is this:

“Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.”

He went on in this vein for a long time, urging them over and over, “Get out while you can; get out of this sick and stupid culture!”

And I think to myself, wow, if nothing else, COVID-19 has given us a unique opportunity to get out of this sick and stupid culture!

Peter's sermon or speech is so moving, along with the descent of Spirit at Pentecost, that on that day about three thousand were "signed up" or baptized. This tells me that the unusual circumstances we find ourselves in today, in which so many are asking "what am I supposed to learn from all this? What am I supposed to do with all this?" is an opportunity in our context to encourage people to change, to get out of this sick and stupid culture.

The numbers baptized in the book of Acts, and the formation of communities of Jesus-followers in that time is the effect of a combination of: Apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. These are the causes of the formation of these communities – of course all empowered and equipped by Spirit, for without Spirit, there would be nothing.

This breaking of bread is not just the communion feast, not just breaking bread to remember Jesus' death, but breaking of bread – or sharing of meals - in small groups as a means of sharing friendship and being in relationship. The awe and friendship they experienced reminds me of the energy of small group gatherings from church – even ministry meetings or council meetings, when we often have refreshments of food, and take the time for devotion, and seek constantly to pull the work we do back to the question: Where is God in this? What is God calling us to do with this situation, or in this context.

These are the bricks that make the building of the church as the body of Christ ... these small gatherings in which Spirit visits us, we are refreshed, we are energized for the work of the kingdom of God: the work of non-judgmental love, the work of forgiveness, the work of reconciliation, the work of breaking down our own individual inner walls so that the divine can move freely within us.

As I read through the book of Acts again, I feel more and more that this time of isolation, and this break from large worship gathering has been an opportunity to be reminded of the kernel that was at the core of the formation of church as we have come to know it: a precious kernel of close knit friendships, sharing and community. How can we return to community life holding these kernel things as goals?

I invite you to think on these things and communicate with each other and with me about them. I believe therein, we will together find some way-making answers for the future of our ministry together. Amen.

Hymn of the Day – To God be the Glory

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CeBoSQsBR0>

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 – **Baba Yetu** (Swahili Lord's Prayer)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6qi393Z7L8>

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 last weekend 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 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:

Baba Yetu – Swahili Lord's Prayer - Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=or4IKVG2zAA>

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: Praise, My Soul the King of Heaven

Click here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

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 May 14th (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 coming week, church council will meet. 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 Fourth 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 ...**