

## **November 29, 2020 – At Home Worship**

Last Monday, our regional municipality moved to Stage Red. Although gatherings in places of worship are still allowed, our church leadership made the difficult decision to close the church in support of the municipal and provincial directive encouraging people to not gather. Sometimes doing everything we can do is not the best way to love our neighbours as ourselves. Council met on Tuesday night, and decided that we observe church closures when our region goes into Red and Grey Stages. As the current closure leads us right up to Christmas week, the decision is to remain closed at least until January 4<sup>th</sup> 2021. We will assess the regional status approaching that week, and decide on re-opening following that.

In the meantime, we have had a few of our volunteer disciples who trained for safe entry and exit protocols for in person worship step down from the roles due to various factors. While we are closed, we will be seeking to re-organize that roster of volunteers and confirm who is willing to continue when we re-open, as well as set a “short notice re-opening team”, so that when we receive the green (or orange) light, we can resume in-person worship. Donna Graham has graciously agreed to lead the rostering process, so you might well be hearing from her ☺

Last time, when we had to close the church, your worship services were simply emailed or mailed to you. We are now able to up the ante on the at-home offering, by inviting you to join worship via Zoom. It is not a perfect system yet, but it allows us to gather together for worship from home. You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to the Zoom service, you can also just call in on one of the numbers included here, and just use your telephone keypad to enter the meeting ID and Passcode when asked. This is the information for our Zoom worship connection this week:

Heide Emrich is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting for Sunday worship: Nov 29, 2020 09:50 AM

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86246676887?pwd=T1YyVXhWbjFMTU5SUloyVzRaM3l1dz09>

Meeting ID: 862 4667 6887

Passcode: 389357

Canadian numbers (long distance charges may apply) 1 587 328 1099 or 1 647 374 4685 or  
1 647 558 0588 or 1 778 907 2071 or 1 204 272 7920 or 1 438 809 7799

You can feel comfortable to share the link and invitation with others, and we hope to see or hear you this Sunday.

Although in-person Bible Study had to be cancelled, the following Adult Study opportunities are also continuing:

- Our online writing group began on Google Meet on Mondays through to Christmas week at 7pm. Please email Avery, [arobin17@mail.uoguelph.ca](mailto:arobin17@mail.uoguelph.ca) to join us.
- Our Bible study of the Gospel of Thomas on ZOOM was rescheduled to November 25<sup>th</sup> and December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7pm. Please email Heide [emrichheide@gmail.com](mailto:emrichheide@gmail.com) to join this study.

This Sunday, we begin the season of Advent, preparing for the coming of Jesus. The readings and lessons are especially poignant to the context in which we find ourselves ... waiting, hopefully in the midst of hard things, for the promise of light and God's presence in our midst.

As always, if you need a phone call or distanced visit, please do reach out by email or phone: [pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org](mailto:pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org) or 519-653-4721 ... It is not my intention to neglect pastoral visitation ministry during this time, sometimes my shins just need a swift kick. The church office is closed, but walking visits or coffee shop visits, video phone visits or regular phone visits remain available ☺ Have a blessing filled week, and please do be in touch if I may be of help or support in these times!

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

**A Word from Lorre:** **Lorre – please add what you like here 😊**

—Lorre Calder

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

**Prelude: Land acknowledgement with Brad's creative composition 😊**

**Click here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

**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:** Holy Creator, with grace and abundant love, you give us eyes to see and ears to hear. We can tune our sight and our hearing to the terrors and fears, the calamities and mayhem that about around us, or we can choose to tune ourselves to your presence, the realm of love into which you draw us through Jesus. Help us to notice the signs of your presence, and help us to stay tuned to your light. Amen.

**The Lesson: Isaiah 64:1-5a, 8-9.**

Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and descend,  
 make the mountains shudder at your presence—  
 As when a forest catches fire,  
 as when fire makes a pot to boil—  
 To shock your enemies into facing you,  
 make the nations shake in their boots!  
 You did terrible things we never expected,  
 descended and made the mountains shudder at your presence.  
 Since before time began  
 no one has ever imagined,  
 No ear heard, no eye seen, a God like you  
 who works for those who wait for him.  
 You meet those who happily do what is right,  
 who keep a good memory of the way you work.

Still, God, you are our Father.

We're the clay and you're our potter:

All of us are what you made us.

Don't be too angry with us, O God.

Don't keep a permanent account of wrongdoing.

Keep in mind, please, we *are* your people—all of us. [The Message Translation]

Word of God, Word of Life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation: Wait For the Lord – the new version Brad emailed us this week!

Click Here: (Lorre please add the link when you have uploaded to youtube, and cc Heide)

**The Holy Gospel according to Mark 13:24-34.**

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

Jesus was telling his disciples about the times to come ...

“Following those hard times,

Sun will fade out,  
moon cloud over,  
Stars fall out of the sky,  
cosmic powers tremble.

“And then they’ll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his Arrival filling the sky—no one will miss it! He’ll dispatch the angels; they will pull in the chosen from the four winds, from pole to pole.

“Take a lesson from the fig tree. From the moment you notice its buds form, the merest hint of green, you know summer’s just around the corner. And so it is with you. When you see all these things, you know he is at the door. Don’t take this lightly. I’m not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won’t wear out.

“But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven’s angels, not even the Son. Only the Father. So keep a sharp lookout, for you don’t know the timetable. It’s like a man who takes a trip, leaving home and putting his servants in charge, each assigned a task, and commanding the gatekeeper to stand watch. So, stay at your post, watching. [The Message Translation]

This is the Gospel of Jesus: **Thanks be to Christ.**

**(Heide: I will provide a fig tree visual for the sermon spot for Zoom ok)**

**Sermon (by Pastor Janaki):**

**(youtube link will be available after Sunday’s Zoom service)**

A few weeks ago, I was walking along the Grand River Trail between Galt & Paris, and the trail is at least a good six or seven feet above the level of the river in most places. Myself and the parishioner I was walking with noticed that beavers had been cutting trees and saplings from along the trail’s edge. This was unusual – beaver usually cut trees that are right at the water’s edge, so it made me wonder ... what do these beaver know that we do not know? Lo and behold this week, with snow and rain, water levels have gone up. The beaver were all ready to do their work, having cut down all their dam building materials ahead of time!

In God’s good creation, there is a reason for everything and a purpose for everything under the sun. I find that so incredible. God is able to take all difficult and seemingly pointless hardships, and craft them into exquisite new directions and possibilities ... and this crafting that happens under the unseen hands of Spirit is most easily accessible when we are tuned in and paying attention to what is going on.

As human beings, we are not that good at being tuned in and paying attention to things other than the things we WANT or CHOOSE to focus on. Sometimes in my own home, I have to be so careful that I do not get sucked into tuning in to the worst possible things – and if I am honest, this is why I do not own TV or a cable subscription. I find it super hard to stay alert and paying attention for what God might be saying.

So, when we had our first church closure, I made my own charts, and mapped out rising infection rates. This was exhausting work in the first few weeks, and some mornings it was all I could do to go check the stats, chart them, and then crawl back into bed ... just kind of waiting for COVID to come along and kill us all right now, why don't you!

(I'm sure nobody else had that experience. I'm sure I am the only one because all of you were staying alert, looking for God's presence right?)

In the Gospel reading for today, and in the Isaiah reading today, when they talk about cosmic powers trembling, God doing terrible things we never expected, making the mountains shudder at his presence ... I was there. Doing my stats. Counting down the death of the world. But ... it didn't happen. It hasn't happened. In fact, the curve flattened, due to the collective work of love on the parts of all, and as the weather grew nicer, we enjoyed our summer ... sure we had to wear masks, and absolutely things were very different ... but we experienced hope and light again.

The notice of closures brings a cloud again, it brings a shuddering again and maybe a harder one even, as we wait to see what will happen at Christmas time.

Jesus says, "Take a lesson from the fig tree." I have looked up images of fig trees: big leaves, yummy purple fruit. Like most of our trees in the winter months, it becomes skeletal, stripped down to nothing (like a certain saviour we know), subject to the elements. But it is unmoving, unwavering in those winter months. It does not try to run away, it does not try to hide in bright shiny distractions or cloak itself in tinsel, it doesn't engage in retail therapy or frequent walks to the fridge or pantry just to see what might be good in there, it doesn't smoke pot, it doesn't drink liquor, it doesn't overeat or indulge in assorted online debauchery ... It stands there, naked, alert, waiting, waiting, for the signal Creation gives that it is time ...

And when it gets that signal, it begins to send forth shoots. Green begins to appear at the tips of naked branches. Before long, it is in bud, in flower, in fruit.

God, I wish I had more fig tree ways about me. I wish I could stand the stripping down that lockdown causes in ways that are so solid and faithful, that I don't run for the cover of distraction, I don't run for the cover of power to get everything back to how I LIKE IT. To how I'VE GOTTEN USED TO THINGS. Even if how I like it was too busy, too inattentive to Spirit, too much about being of the World than of the light of Jesus given to me.

It is easier to cope with the loss of control, the calamitous feeling all around, by scrambling around for busy work, anything to cover the nakedness of my stillness. Anything to cover the skeletal vulnerability of, dear beloved God, just waiting.

Really, just waiting? Just waiting for the signal from Creator?

Waiting requires a vulnerability.

Sitting still, yet alert.

Being present, not distracted.

Turning off the noise. Turning off the news. Turning off the radio. Listening to maybe the clock ticking, maybe the sound of traffic, a dog bark in the distance, the sound of the furnace or boiler tripping on and off ... sitting, quietly, alert, listening.

If you do this, you will encounter something magical. I have come to call it the COVID Evolution. I'm not saying this is easy. But if you take this time to sit quietly, gently removing all distractions, and being alert ... you will hear God. You will feel God. You will encounter your unity, your oneness with God in whose image you are made. You will encounter a deep abiding peace. That peace may nudge you: reach out to this person, send a card to that person, make an offering to the food bank, take a walk with a friend (or be on the phone to them while they walk if you can't) ... that place of peace will nudge you to ... notice things in nature, notice the birdsong, notice the busy work of the squirrels, notice where the beaver are cutting things down, notice the steady beat of your own heart.

That place of peace will nudge you to creative ventures, to sew, to write, to sing, to dance – it will lead you away from anxiety, pushing you onto the crest of the wave of the unfolding realm of God's light ... God is at the door of your heart, and we often imagine God on the outside of that door, knocking to be let in ... but what if the indwelling Jesus is knocking from the inside of that door, just waiting to be let out to play with you?

“Take a lesson from the fig tree. From the moment you notice its buds form, the merest hint of green, you know summer's just around the corner. And so it is with you. When you see all these things, you know he is at the door.”

Be alert, remain awake, do not be distracted, do not try to cover your vulnerability up ...  
bring yourself, soul naked, limbs exposed like the wintered fig tree,  
bring yourself naked of fruit or flower or bud ...  
bring yourself to the evolution into which COVID invites us ...  
the evolution of vulnerability and tuning in to Creator ...  
the evolution of letting Jesus who knocks on that door within us,  
the evolution of letting our inner Christ out.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day: God Who Made the Earth and Heaven ELW 564, Ar Hyd Y Nos; Bradley Moggah, Piano

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYwWAswMKV4>

The main wording of the prayer below came from a Thanksgiving message sent out by the Interim Executive Director of the Cambridge Shelter Corporation, Anne Tinker, in an email to staff and volunteers. Anne's message was not worded as a prayer – but her words sounded prayerful and appropriate to me. It captured so well the many things we have to be thankful for, that, with some additional intercessions, edits and Anne's permission I share some of her words in our prayers today.

**A Thanksgiving Prayer:**

All-powerful God: You bless us in countless ways,

Thereby showing your authority, your grace, your mercy and your boundless love.

We are thankful for the many blessings you give us:

We are thankful that we can turn on a tap and have clean water to drink, shower, or wash clothes, when so many in the world do not.

We are thankful for food in our cupboards and in our refrigerators when so many go hungry.

We are thankful that with a flick of a switch we have light or heat when so many have neither.

We are thankful for roofs over our heads, warm beds to sleep in, and a place to call home when numbers of those experiencing homelessness are climbing everywhere.

We are thankful to be part of an organization that works to serve others and to make our little corner of the world a better place.

Holy God:

Help us to remember to respond to your generosity mindful that we are created in your image and likeness.

Help us to make love our pandemic of choice: make us vectors of infectious love.

Where these times sow fear and insecurity, help us to sow faith, hope and joy.

Make us your instruments of justice, grace and mercy.

Rid us of judgmental attitudes and replenish our reservoirs of compassion.

Help us to live safely; reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.

We pray that you would also keep us in good spirits, as we feel the colder weather coming,

And as we contend with the reality of rising infection rates ... please keep us in your care.

We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Let us share the peace of Christ:**

The Peace of Christ be with you always, in your home and in mine, and throughout God's creation. (If you have others around you, share a sign of peace in a non-infectious way)

**Lord's Prayer:**

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: For All the Saints ELW 422; Bradley Moggach, organ

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwezIPVjCq0&t=2s>

**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.***

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