

November 8, 2020 – At Home Worship

On November 1, we had a slightly smaller sized gathering for in-person worship than on our re-opening Sunday. With rising infection rates, many discerned their best option was to worship at home. We will continue to provide an at-home worship offering that is suited for mail, online and email delivery. This gives you the full freedom to assess your own context and determine how you would like to worship ☺ Today, your at home service includes a pre-recorded link to the sermon, as well as a number of hymns prepared by Brad. On Sunday afternoon, following the in-person service, we hope to email to you a recording of the sermon as it was preached.

October 25th was Reformation Sunday this year, and November 1st was All Saints Sunday. In some ways these two celebrations snuck up on me, as the preoccupation with adjusting to a dual worship format (on-line / mail out and in-person) has distracted from normalcy. In a regular year, we would have written to those who have had a loved one die in the course of the previous year, and we would also have called out names and lit candles at our in-person gathering on All Saints Sunday. This year, we will celebrate All Saints on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, November 22, 2020. If you have had a loved one die in the course of this year, please do provide their name to myself or the church office by November 15 2020 to allow for preparation of worship material.

As our in-person gathering is a fraction of our membership and regular attendance, we will prepare a “remembering the saints” service by taking all the names we gather and including them in Sunday worship during the Hymn of the Day on November 22, 2020. We will also prepare an online accessible Youtube file which will include (such as you request and provide permission for), names and (where provided) photographs set to music played by Brad. This way we will be able to remember those who have died in worship, either at home or in our sanctuary, before this most unusual church year is out. We have also ordered sterile, stay in your spot, communion servings and if they arrive in time, we will celebrate our first communion service since COVID on November 22nd. As many ELCIC churches have been doing, whether online or by telecast, we invite those at home to join in communion on that November 22nd with their choice of communion elements – audio will be provided to guide you at home if you have internet access.

In this week of USA Presidential elections, keeping our lamps lit and oil at the ready and wicks trimmed is such good advice. I hope the sermon will be both an encouragement and a reminder to remain closely connected with God who came and comes again – when we are connected to the source, we always have the power to move mountains with our faith, regardless of what the world may be up to ☺

If you need to know what is what for in-person worship, please read the post-amble which follows this pre-amble! Please also check the post-amble for Adult Study offerings beginning this week.

As always, if you need a phone call or distanced visit, please do reach out by email or phone: 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 ☺

Have a blessing filled week, and please do be in touch if you have any queries around in-person worship or any other stuff!

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

Post-Amble Note on in-person worship requirements:

If you are thinking of attending worship in the weeks to come, please read through this page of notes carefully so you know what to expect when you come to church. Our approach at St Peter's is based on protocols taking every possible precaution which include these ... You will need to arrive early for the entry protocol, and come to the Church street accessible entrance, at which you will be asked four assessment questions by an outside Greeter. A face covering is required. These are the assessment questions, and a self-assessment is advisable at home:

1. Have you travelled outside of the province or country within the last 14 days?
2. Have you tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 days?
3. Have you been in contact with anyone that has exhibited symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19 virus in the past 14 days?
4. Do you have any of the following symptoms that are unusual for you: fever, new cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, chills, headache, new loss of taste or smell?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions, then you will be asked to return home. Otherwise, you will be allowed into the building, and an inside Greeter will check your temperature (if above 100°F or 37.8°C, you will be asked to return home) and ask you to sanitize your hands. You will be seated by an usher to ensure social distancing in the pew. Families will be seated together. Seating will be assigned from front to back in the sanctuary. All volunteer disciples also want to worship, so please arrive early to ensure seating can be completed in time for 10 am start of worship.

Adult Study Offerings this week:

Writing Group:

The things of these times have given us lots of food for thought, and sometimes it is hard to even pull a thread of thought and follow it through with all that is going on. Writing, whether journaling or for sharing, is a really good way to follow these threads of thought and even prayerfully reflect on the things we have experienced, and the things we anticipate.

Avery Robinson has agreed to be our technology host for an online meeting of a Writing Group. We plan for three Mondays in November: November 9th, 16th and 30th at 7pm, to gather on Google Meet. Our sessions will aim to be an hour long, and will include three small writing exercises:

- A journal writing exercise, where, provided with a reflective prompt, each participant receives some time to write their thoughts, experiences and feelings followed by a time for optional sharing. This first writing exercise looks back and at our current experience.
- A creative writing exercise, where, provided with a creative writing prompt, each participant receives some time to write a short creative piece, followed by a time for optional sharing. In our last session, we will have an online writing editor, Jacob, join us to offer some input to our written offerings.
- Finally, a journal writing exercise, where, provided with a reflective prompt, participants will write about something they are looking forward to in the future, and why. Again, time will be provided for optional sharing at the end.

All you need to join this class is to send your email request to Avery, arobin17@mail.uoguelph.ca to be included in the meet invitation. I will prepare the content, and Avery and I will co-facilitate.

A Taste of Thomas on Zoom:

Before COVID, our in-person Monday Bible Study was studying the Gospel of Thomas. This gospel was not included in the Bible, and gave us a good opportunity to consider the political and social context which framed what got included in the canonization that formed the Bible, and what got left out. By looking at where there were close parallels between the Gospel of Thomas and Biblical material, and looking at where there were departures, we could imagine together the contexts for inclusion and exclusion of material.

The “Taste of Thomas” study will take a few of the Gospel of Thomas teachings and examine them in tension with the parallels from the Bible. Our discussion allows us to examine the whys of the differences between the canonical and extra canonical writing, as well as share our observations on meaning and nuance. If you have ever wondered about why some items are included in the Bible, and others are not, this study will feed your wonder!

With the help of technology, we are able to offer a small taste of the Gospel of Thomas study, which we will do over two Wednesday nights in November: November 11th and November 25th at 7pm. Heide Emrich will host the Zoom meeting, and I will facilitate the teaching part. If you are interested in doing this study together, please contact me or Heide. (Heide’s email is emrichheide@gmail.com). If you do not have Zoom, but would like to join, get in touch ahead of time and we will try to organize for you to have print of the study material and the phone number for the call, so that you can dial in. Please invite friends from other contexts than church to join you – this is a study to be shared amongst believers and non-believers alike ☺

**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: Creator and Source of all, justice and love are your way. With them you provide light in all darkness, and you have given us the light of Jesus to carry. Keep us connected with you. Remind us when we need to plug in to source so that we are not caught unawares. Keep us in readiness for the Kingdom Come, ready to join with you, with the readiness of couples about to wed. We ask for these powerful things that will keep us charged and ready, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Lesson: Amos 5:18-24.

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. [NRSV] Word of God, word of life. *C: Thanks be to God.* *

Gospel Acclamation: Stay With Us Text/Music: Farquharson/Klusmeier; featuring Bradley Moggach, piano

Click Here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_67Uu7hBsc

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The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 25:1-13.

C: Glory to you O Christ.

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. [NRSV]

This is the Gospel of our Lord: Thanks be to Christ.

Sermon (by Pastor Janaki): <https://youtu.be/6NhMV20KYI8>

In this past week of unknowing that has been like a very slow sunrise on the results of the USA presidential elections, I was deeply aware of my own tendency to get entangled in the ups and downs of vote counting, and the associated despair and struggle with meaning-making which frequently dominates me when uncertainty is in the air. And there has probably never been a year like 2020 for most of us, a year with so much uncertainty, and the possibility for so many ups and downs. I needed an image to hold on to, to remind me to stay connected to God, the Source of all hope and justice and love. I want to share that image with you today.

Some of you know my home. I have an unfortunately sloped driveway. I say unfortunate because when it snows, and especially if the snow is heavy, shoveling that driveway can be mind-bogglingly tedious. Shoveling that driveway makes me think of the tropical lands from whence I came and wonder what the heck am I doing in Canada. But I love this country, so I find ways to bring joy to shoveling. And one of the simplest ways is to play some really good dance music while I shovel, so that shoveling becomes more like dancing with the snow ☺

I used to wear my headphones and shovel. But then I had the bright idea of getting a wireless speaker. By the magic of technology, this highly rated item from Amazon promised a number of hours on its rechargeable battery and could connect (without wires) to an app on my phone which played good music. So the first winter, I got this wireless speaker, mighty for its size, charged that puppy up, and I was ready for the snow. And it came and came and came. And I got out there and had me a dance party with it! I am confident I looked much more sane boogeying to music others could also hear, than boogeying to music only I could hear on headphones.

I didn't use the speaker again until COVID came along ... you know the long spring we had that just invited one out into the garden this year? So I thought, I'll use my wireless speaker. Tried to charge it, no luck. It seems that the rechargeable aspect of it had faded right away, it no longer held charge, and now it needed to be plugged in if I was going to listen to music on it outdoors! It could still make the wireless connection to my cell phone, but the speaker itself had to be plugged in.

When I think of it, before COVID life, I was kinda like that wireless speaker ... I felt like I could charge up a few times a week and then run disconnected from my source: God. Sometimes, in that disconnected time, I would go up and down in energy and hope and despair cycles. Then when COVID came along, I seemed to spend more time in the darkness – unless I remained plugged in. Like that wireless speaker, I could still

produce good things, but ONLY if I remained continuously plugged in to God – always ready, always aware, always awake.

Today's Gospel reading goes into a lot of details about wise brides and foolish brides; the wise taking extra oil for their lamps, and the foolish apparently not thinking this far ahead. The latter group took lamps but no oil. I don't know, maybe they thought there would be a magic bucket of oil in the bridal chamber, maybe they were reliant on the generosity of others ... either way, it's an odd story for a Gospel story ... it is not about sharing, it is not about caring for each other ... it is about how each one of us keeps ourselves ready, aware, awake, for the coming not of a bridegroom (although that picture does fit well with fairy tale motifs the world over, which is probably why Jesus used it to illustrate this example) ... we keep ourselves ready, aware, awake for the knocking of God, for the Kingdom Come – the Kingdom towards which we are hurtling in the midst of darkness, the light which we are approaching, if we are wise, with our own lights at the ready.

The wise, regardless of whatever uncertainty might be afoot, are not caught in the darkness. And in order for their wicks to be trimmed, their lights must go out at some point – but they do not seem to be functioning in anxiety and disorder, because they KNOW, they KNOW that they not only have extra oil, but they KNOW the promised one is coming for them. And they know to remain prepared, to keep their lights lit, to tend their lamps, to remain connected to the source until the promised one, the Kingdom Come, the Kingdom of Heaven comes about.

In this time of COVID and presidential elections and “natural disasters” in abundance, you might feel like being here, taking this time for Sunday worship will ward off evil, will charge you up for the week ahead, and then you might get to Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday and be running on fumes, looking for oil to top up your lamp.

In the reading from the prophet Amos, we hear God's disdain at this rechargeable battery approach to life. God wants us to be capable of bearing light, of being joyous dance music for the world in all times and in all places – for we are after all, created in God's image and likeness, and it is true that God is good ALL THE TIME. So, it is easy to understand the consternation of God, encountering God's people trying to behave like wireless speakers, trying to behave like assembling to worship is the be all and end all ... God asks through Amos:

“Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?”

I can relate to these words, everywhere we turn someone posits danger, it's in all the news, it's all over the media ... these times do carry their gloom and dangers with COVID so dominating our realities and planet. But God continues through Amos:

“I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies ... Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.”

Well ... gee, the noise of our songs certainly has been whipped right away from us ... we can no longer gather to even sing together in this strange land we find ourselves in ...

But then ... but then, comes the plug in instruction; then comes the “give up this rechargeable battery idea” instruction:

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

God is not looking for us to be like reservoirs, holders, KEEPERS of living water, KEEPERS of divine joy and love. We are supposed to let these flow and bubble and spring and roll out of us, in abundance, so abundant that it is like an ever flowing stream. Well the only way I know how to do that is to stay plugged in,

to watch for when you plug out and go [tap tap tap on the shoulder] “looks like your plug fell out there, you may wanna put it back in”.

Navigate uncertainty and waiting by being prepared, by remaining always connected to the source of living water, the source of eternal light. Do that and live.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day: Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service ELW 712 (Beach Spring)

Bradley Moggach, Organ

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt5vfXUwA8M&t>

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Beach Spring, Music: The Sacred Harp, Philadelphia, 1844; arr Selected Hymns 1985

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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.

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.**

While you listen to the offertory hymn, continue your prayers and consider how you may be an offering in the coming week.

Offertory: ELW 885 Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTzPCCw2h6M&feature=youtu.be>

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Offering Prayer

God of goodness and growth,
all creation is yours,
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
Water and word, social distancing and hand-washing:
these are signs of your abundant grace.
Nourish us through these gifts,
that we might proclaim your steadfast love
in our communities and in the world,
through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: Arise, My Soul, Arise ELW 827, Text Johan Kahl, Finnish Folk Tune; Bradley Moggach, Piano

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1V7AinwJHk>

Text: Johan Karl/ Tr. Ernest Ryden, Dale Wood; Finnish Folk Tune

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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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