

**Opening Music: *What a Friend We Have in Jesus Instrumental*, Music: Joseph Medlicott Scriven, 1855, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020.**

## **Welcome**

Peace be with you, this perfect moment in which you are alive. This weekend is Thanksgiving Weekend, and in the southern Ontario part of the world where our churches are located, it is autumn, and a beautiful one it is to be sure.

I am Rev. Dr. Candice Bist and along with my husband Bruce Ley, we serve Trinity United Church and Primrose United church in The Hills of Headwaters. This area is the highest elevation in southern Ontario, the place from where the rivers gather and then flow south to the Great Lakes. It is an area rich in old growth forests, secret rocky caves, streams and marvelous places to walk. The Bruce Trail runs through the area, and throughout the covid pandemic, it has welcomed many people seeking solace and quiet space, and that is certainly something to be so very grateful about.

But you do not have to walk in a world biosphere to know the beauty that is around you. It is standing at your very front door, no matter where that door is. To walk into the sunshine, to gaze out the window at the changing light of the day, offers up the beauty of the universe, if we have hearts open to beatify and willing to see.

This is the heart of the Thanksgiving season – to understand what we have in front of us, and to be grateful for what we have. We live in uncertain times. But this is certain: to be grateful for the beauty of nature, to be appreciate for every single relationship we have right now, right here, to love ourselves and to love God and to love others, this is the fullness of life. And it is offered every day to us, mercifully, with no trace of yesterday upon it. Let us gather in gentleness and surround ourselves with grace, this very hour.

***Breathe on Me Breath of God*, Music: Robert Jackson, Lyrics: Edwin Hatch, Artist: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**

Breathe on me breath of God  
fill me with life anew  
that I may love what thou dost love  
and do what thou wouldst do

Breathe on me breath of God  
until my heart is pure  
until my will is one with thine

to do and to endure

Breathe on me breath of God  
till I am wholly thine  
until this earthly part of me  
glows with thy fire divine

Breathe on me breath of God  
so, shall I never die  
but live with thee the perfect life  
of thine eternity  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do

### **Call to Worship**

In traditional church language, services begin with what we designate as a ‘call to worship.’ This is really just something that is reflective, that attempts to draw us away from the sorrows we bear in the moment, or the worries that are plaguing us. It is not that we do not acknowledge the worry and sorrow and anxieties, for no doubt they are giving us important information. But we lay them down, we put them aside, so that our bodies and minds and spirits may rest from worldly concerns, and we can bask in the warmth of divine affection. To worship, is to live in the land of awe and wonder of all the magnificence of God, that is not us, that we did not create, nor do we control. And on this Thanksgiving Weekend, we are particularly grateful for the beatify of the world and the season, and the wonderful design of families that draw us together, even when we are physically apart.

### **Our call to worship this morning is from a well-known Thanksgiving Hymn**

Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving  
To God the creator triumphantly raise.  
Who fashioned and made us, protected and stayed us,  
Who guided us on to the end of our days.  
His banners are o'er us, His light goes before us,  
A pillar of fire shining forth in the night.  
'Till shadows have vanished and darkness is banished  
As forward we travel from light into light.

His law he enforces, the stars in their courses  
And sun in its orbit obediently shine;

The hills and the mountains, the rivers and fountains,  
The deeps of the ocean proclaim him divine.  
We too should be voicing our love and rejoicing;  
With glad adoration a song let us raise  
'Till all things now living unite in thanksgiving:  
"To God in the highest, Hosanna and praise!"

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious One, God of all Time and Matter and Mysteries beyond our comprehension,

Such a strange thing we do, standing before you, gathering in groups here and there longing to bring you our foolishness and hopes and dreams, hopefully to be humbled by the enormity of your love the pours down around us, and of which, so often, we are simply unaware.

But here and now, we stop to try and grasp its wholeness, and the wonder of its gift.

May your love spill over us, washing away any thoughts unkind or un useful, so that we may better help and serve one another, as our precious Jesus showed us how to do.

We may not always get it right. But you do.

So, we tuck ourselves under your wing and wait for instructions to fly, knowing you will not send us out without the strength and ability to see your work done.

Thank you for every blessing this day, and all the blessings that are yet to come.

Amen.

### **Musical Interlude**

### **Spiritual Practice – Devotion**

Many of you in the neighbourhood will know of the sad news of Gary Shaver's passing and will have Jennifer in your thoughts and prayers. Jennifer and Gary both, always exhibited that gentle spirit that emerges when gratitude is foundational in a person's life. Gary had been unwell quite some long time, but he was always thinking of others, not wanting to make a fuss, so sweet in his interactions with everyone. And always, always, always grateful for the very day of life in which he lived. Gary really did exemplify what it means to be a Christian, which was his faith of birth, and of devotion also.

We have spoken often in the last year on the importance of gratitude as a spiritual practice – something that we are conscious of in order to strengthen our spiritual core – and certainly that is the main theme of Thanksgiving. But with Jennifer and Gary so much in my mind this last week, I want to draw your attention to another spiritual practice, which the Shavers so beautifully embodied.

Devotion.

Jennifer's devotion to her husband, and his to her. Their collective devotion to the core values of the Christian faith – compassion and grace – have up lifted us all, modeled for us what it means to be a 'person of the way' and the way, of course, is love. We need role models now more than ever, with so much stumbling around in the dark in the news and on the television. We need real live people in our everyday lives that are trying to do things differently – trying to extend grace to all people, mining the depths of devotion by their constancy of heart.

When one loves another person deeply, there is God.

When one loves another deeply, there is wonder. And there is awe.

And it makes of the lover something new, something shiny, some kind of loveliness that walks about and brings with it an untouchable veil of beauty

This is what devotion is. There is no fear within it. Only love. And grace. And beauty.

So, our deep gratitude to Gary and to Jennifer, for showing us what devotion looks like every day as they have lived out that devotion before us these last years. May we have learned well and replicate your graciousness in our own lives.

When one among us dies, it brings to mind our own mortality, and that is not necessarily a bad thing, for it is good to contemplate – yes, even in the midst of the beauty of this Thanksgiving weekend – our own death and dying, the fact that one day, we will simply no longer be here in this world.

Henry Thoreau, a great lover of the beauty of nature, an observer of life and death, contemplated all these matters in a simple reflection that offers the falling leaves as our teacher in the grace of dying, in walking as a form of devoted meditation, and in the gift of seeing beauty all around us.

I offer it as a reflection to Jennifer, and to all of us, as we ground ourselves in gratitude, look for the beauty around us, and celebrate truly, in our hearts, the joy of the season, and Thanksgiving weekend.

Thoreau wrote this reflection – Autumnal Tints – as he lay dying of tuberculosis over 150 years ago. He loved nature, particularly the beauty of the fall. Thoreau was a transcendentalist, which

is closely related to what we would see as the Unitarian faith, though with a greater passion, perhaps, for the richness of the spiritual life. It has shades of the Protestant theologian Immanuel Kant within it, as well as the Upanishads, the sacred texts of the Hindu faith, and throughout it the very real belief in the inherent goodness of people, and nature.

### **Musical Interlude**

October is the month of painted leaves.  
Their rich glow now flashes round the world.  
As fruits and leaves and the day itself  
acquire a bright tint just before they fall,  
so the year near its setting.  
October is its sunset sky;  
November the later twilight.

### **Musical Interlude**

It is pleasant to walk over the beds  
of these fresh, crisp, and rustling leaves.  
How beautifully they go to their graves!  
How gently lay themselves down  
and turn to mould!  
Painted of a thousand hues, and fit  
to make the beds of us living.  
So they troop to their last resting place,  
light and frisky. They put on no weeds,  
but merrily they go scampering over the earth,  
selecting the spot,  
choosing a lot,  
ordering no iron fence...  
How many flutterings  
before they rest quietly in their graves!  
They that soared so loftily, how contentedly  
they return to dust again, and are laid low,  
resigned to lie and decay at the foot of the tree,  
and afford nourishment to new generations of their kind,  
as well as to flutter on high!  
They teach us how to die.

### **Musical Interlude**

Let your walks now be a little more adventurous;  
ascend the hills. If, about the last of October,  
you ascend any hill in the outskirts of our town,  
and probably of yours, and look over the forest,  
you may see well, what I have endeavored to describe.  
All this you surely will see, and much more,  
if you are prepared to see it,—if you look for it...  
Objects are concealed from our view,  
not so much because they are out of the course  
of our visual ray as because we do not bring  
our minds and eyes to bear on them;  
for there is no power to see in the eye itself,  
any more than in any other jelly.  
We do not realize how far and widely,  
or how near and narrowly, we are to look.  
The greater part of the phenomena of Nature  
are for this reason concealed from us all our lives.  
The gardener sees only the gardener's garden...  
There is just as much beauty  
visible to us in the landscape  
as we are prepared to appreciate,  
—not a grain more.

Our first scripture is Psalm 121, in musical form.

***Unto the Hills*, Music: Charles H. Purday, Lyrics: John Campbell, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**

Unto the hills around do I lift up  
My longing eyes;  
O whence for me shall my salvation come,  
From whence arise?  
From God the Lord doth come my certain aid,  
From God the Lord, who heav'n and earth hath made.

He will not suffer that thy foot be moved:  
Safe shalt thou be.  
No careless slumber shall His eyelids close,  
Who keepeth thee.  
Behold, He sleepeth not, He slumbereth ne'er,  
Who keepeth Israel in His holy care.

Jehovah is Himself thy keeper true,  
Thy changeless shade;  
Jehovah thy defense on thy right hand  
Himself hath made.  
And thee no sun by day shall ever smite;  
No moon shall harm thee in the silent night.

From every evil shall He keep thy soul,  
From every sin;  
Jehovah shall preserve thy going out,  
Thy coming in.  
Above thee, watching, He whom we adore  
Shall keep thee henceforth, yea, for evermore.

### **Introduction to the Second Scripture**

Our second scripture comes from the lectionary, a great favourite, and one read on many occasions – at weddings, ordinations, funerals if a person has lived a particularly joyous life.

It is written by Paul the apostle from his jail cell – an important piece of information because in a jail cell there are few distractions and time to really think deeply. Think of the famous, thoughtful writings that have come from Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Dietrich Bonhoeffer who had time will in jail to distill their thinking, to take time to consider – as possible death awaited them – what was most important to tell people about.

Paul is in this same position. And he chooses to tell people about joy.

Also, note that this piece of scripture is a very real letter written to a very real group of people – the early group of people who have formed an early Christian contingent in the city of Philippi. And you will note that Paul has a great affection for this particular group of people – you might say from his language that they are his favourite little church group. The people who assembled the Biblical texts have broken the letter up into chapters and verses etc. But it is really just a continuation of the letter he was writing in what is called chapter three.

### **Philippians 4:1-8**

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-

workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

### **Reflection**

Just as a little side note, which I think is interesting in our current context, I read the scriptures from the New Revised Standard Version, which is the one we usually read in the United church these days. And you will see that the letter readings, Therefore.....continuing on from his thoughts of the last chapter.....my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for.....

But if you read from the King James Version, it would read, *Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for.*

This is just a little small lesson in translation, but it is an interesting one, because it shows us how culture influences our translation of scripture in very real ways.

The Greek word *adelphoi* appears several times in this epistle (1:14; 3:1, 17). That word is masculine, so a strict translation would be “brothers.” So, in the King James Version of the scriptures, written in 1611, at the command of the King of England, translates the word directly – *adelphoi* – brothers. So, Paul writing to the church in Philippi, writes, Therefore, brothers.

But the New Revised Standard Version was written in 1989 and commissioned by the national council of Churches – not one person, but a collection of people from a wide variety of Christian denominations – and they had an agenda of inclusive language. It translates *adelphoi* “brothers and sisters.” That is appropriate, given the importance of women in the Philippian church. When Paul first arrived in Philippi, his first congregation was a group of women, and his first convert was Lydia (Acts 16:13-15). In in our reading today he speaks directly to Euodia and Syntyche—two women. Women are an important part of the Philippian church, just as they are an important part of the church today, and so translations make allowances for this understanding.

Do you see how that works? Hope so.

And just to note that the two women that Paul mentions are not mentioned elsewhere in the scriptures, nor is Clement of whom he speaks, but you can imagine that they were two women in



the Philippian church who were perhaps struggling to work cheerfully together. This is a rather lovely reminder that within our church, Paul is reminding us that we must always find ways to get along.

So, here is Paul, sitting in prison – and they were pretty dank cells back then, nothing cushy about them at all – and he writes to a small emerging group of people, men and women, who are trying as very best they can to make sense of what is going on in the world and to follow the teachings of Jesus.

Think of the context.

Jesus has been crucified. The disciples are working as itinerant preachers, mendicants – beggars, trying to tell this story of what it meant to them to live and work and learn from this person, Jesus, who was from Nazareth of all places, a place scoundrels gathered, a place that did not have a high place in the culture at that time, a back water – what good could come from Nazareth the people of the days ask? What indeed!

But here is Paul, encouraging this little group of people to do what in the middle of the grave uncertainty. Be joyful? He is living in the uncertainty of his life and death. The uncertainty of theirs – for Christians and Jews alike were being punished, crucified, vilified, shoved about, mocked, disparaged. They were the outcasts of society. They had no place in society. No fancy buildings. No scriptures. No doctrine.

They were simply a group of people who had decided to follow Jesus and his way of love that included everyone. That extended grace to everyone. That embraced everyone. That forgave everything.

Paul's words to the church in Philippi in the early first century are the same words that I offer to you in the year 2020, when things are unsettled yes, but certainly not any more unsettled than they were to those of the emerging Christian faith so long ago. Paul knew what he was asking. And he asked with the certainty that it would bring contentment to people. And so, it does, and do it will.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Here is a little country marching song for you to take with you when you go for a walk this weekend, to remember who is in charge of this world – not you and not me! And who holds your hand. And when Jesus holds your hand, well, that is reason to rejoice.

And for dear Jennifer, for you especially, will all our love for the days of walking in the days ahead. Gary may not be there to hold your hand, but Jesus is.

***I Just Know Who Holds Tomorrow*, Music/Lyrics: Ira F. Stanphill, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**

I don't know about tomorrow  
 I just live for day to day  
 I don't borrow from the sunshine  
 For it's skies may turn to gray  
 I don't worry o'er the future  
 For I know what Jesus said  
 And today I'll walk beside Him  
 For He knows what lies ahead  
 Many things about tomorrow  
 I don't seem to understand  
 But I know who holds tomorrow  
 And I know who holds my hand  
 Ev'ry step is getting brighter  
 As the golden stairs I climb  
 Ev'ry burden's getting lighter  
 Ev'ry cloud is silver lined  
 There the sun is always shining  
 There no tear will dim the eye  
 At the ending of the rainbow  
 Where the mountains touch the sky  
 Many things about tomorrow  
 I don't seem to understand  
 But I know who holds tomorrow  
 And I know who holds my hand

### **Announcements**

As you will know from last week, both Primrose and Trinity United Churches are physically closed for the time being. This is a reflection of the considered thought from both councils and those who took upon themselves the job of deciding on when and how our churches will reopen.

This decision was not made lightly, and though we grieve the loss of meeting in person, we stand in solidarity with others in our community for the health and safety of everyone.

We will, however, be reinitiating our zoom gatherings of last winter for Practicing Compassion study, so watch for that in next week's announcements and on the website. It is open to everyone who would like to join us. I will post the zoom co-ordinates on our website, Shelburne primrose.com

Though our buildings are closed, the great work continues. Prayer, in particular, is so needed at this time. Your prayers are needed at this time. Do not think that prayer is unimportant. It is the cornerstone of Christian work. Pray for your churches, pray for your community. Pray when you wake. Pray when to go to sleep. And this week, as a spiritual exercise, pray when you walk, remembering who walks beside you, seeing in the fluttering and dying leaves your own inevitable death, and the gift that may yet be to others.

The world is filled with wonders.

You are one of them.

Be blessed and know yourself to be loved.

Let us close in prayer together.....

God of Grace, and God of Gravity,

We thank you for the blessing of being able to gather this Thanksgiving weekend, even in this virtual way. We thank you for so many people through the years, for all those who gathered to pray, to keep company with you, to amend their ways, to offer solace to their community.

Grant us many more years of continued service in whatever form that takes.

Grant us changed hearts, open to your people, open to service, open to new understandings of you.

May we continue to serve as Jesus did, seeing deep into the spirit of others, and offering them sanctuary.

Here us now as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us.....

**The 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.

***For the Beauty of the Earth*, Music: David Evans, Lyrics: Folliott Sandford Pierpoint,  
Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**