

Opening Music: *What a Friend We Have in Jesus Instrumental*, Music: Charles Crozat Converse, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020.

Welcome

Peace be with you this beautiful fall weekend in late September. It has been a week filled with distressing events reported on the daily news, rising cov-id numbers, and the palpable fear that seems to be pervading the simplest of conversation as the phrase ‘second wave’ enters our vocabulary. Still, the extravagant loveliness of the autumn season is not to be denied, a reminder that life is a moving tapestry, filled with contradictions, mystery, and always, when we have eyes to see, even in the midst of sorrow, delight. And delight, you may recall Rabbi Heshel teaching, is the Sabbath atmosphere. And any time you are listen to this podcast, you have found yourself in Sabbath time.

I am Rev. Dr. Candice Bist and along with my husband, Bruce Ley, we currently serve the Shelburne Primrose Pastoral Charge, which consists of two United Churches in southern Ontario. I am back from a time of rest, and we have a new series of podcasts leading us through the liturgical season of creation and towards the new year season of Advent.

It has been said repeatedly, that the only thing that is constant is change. A truth to be sure, but it is not so much fun to be living through a time when nothing seems to be holding steady, when daily the landscape shifts in surprising ways, revealing ways, and planning more than a week in advance is a thing of the past. But under it all, there are the constants that never leave us. There is the desire to connect one with another, in whatever way that is possible. There is the desire for life, and the fullness of life that makes for rich experience. There is the desire to avoid the inevitable fragility of being human, knowing we are but tissue paper wrapped up in ribbon of hope, and perhaps, courage. There is the desire to love, to be touched by love, and all the many ways it pours forth into the world.

So, here is a dabbling of gathered treasures to enrich your life this very day – some beautiful music from visiting musicians and composers, reflections on the wonder and power of nature, and narrative and musical scripture readings exposing a faith

that is pliable, alive, and full of questions that we may live out the answers, not claim ownership of them.

Deep Breaths. One of you this week, having experienced a great disappointment, quoted back to me, the wonderful words of Julian of Norwich, the words that were the theme of her shewings as she called them, or visions, as we might call them. An anchoress living an isolated life in the midst of the black plague in England, she experiences Jesus saying to her, “And all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.” And so, it shall. We begin with Pete Seeger’s classic interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 8. You may remember I told you that Seeger wrote this song in irritation and angst, from a crumpled bit of paper he had been carrying around in his pocket to help him make sense of a world that no longer made sense to him.

May it help you even this moment, to know that there is a time for everything. We are not the timekeepers. We are those who try to learn from the constancy of the tides, the steadiness of the trees, way of new possibility at the foot of the cross.

Music: Turn, Turn, Turn, Music/Lyrics: Pete Seeger, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist

To everything turn, turn, turn
 There is a season turn, turn, turn
 And a time to every purpose
 Under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
 A time to plant, a time to reap
 A time to kill, a time to heal
 A time to laugh, a time to weep.

To everything turn, turn, turn
 There is a season turn, turn, turn
 And a time to every purpose
 Under heaven

A time to build up
A time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together.

To everything turn, turn, turn
There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose
Under heaven

A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing
To everything turn, turn, turn
There is a season turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose
Under heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rain, a time of sow
A time for love, a time for hate
A time for peace
I swear it's not too late

Call to Worship

Our call to worship this morning is from beat poet and sometime theologian, Allan Ginsberg, who released his famous raging rant in 1956, a wild, noisy outpouring of despair against what he saw as a harsh society, who failed to see the holiness in all the ordinary matters. To recognize the sacred in all matters, is to be part of what is called in religious language, the mystic tradition. No doubt, Ginsberg would have a thing or two to say about my edits to his work. But it is Sabbath, and this is a

family podcast and raging rants – in the tradition of the many angry psalms – can verge on vulgar...forgiveness asked.....and hopefully received.

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
Holy! Holy!

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy!

Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! every day is in eternity!
Everyman's an angel!

The bum's as holy as the seraphim! the madman is holy as you my soul are holy!
The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are holy the
ecstasy is holy!

Holy my mother in the insane asylum!

Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse! Holy the jazz bands
marijuana hipster's peace peyote pipes & drums!

Holy the solitudes of skyscrapers and pavements! Holy the cafeterias filled with
the millions! Holy the mysterious rivers of tears under the streets!
Holy the vast lamb of the middleclass! Holy the crazy shepherds of rebellion!

Holy forgiveness! mercy! charity! faith! Holy! Ours! bodies! suffering!
magnanimity!
Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!

Opening Prayer

Gracious, Creator,

The world seems unsteady on its feet these days, moving too quickly in many
directions, without a clear path ahead or a steady pace. It is frightening to behold.

But fear has always been what clouds our vision. Grant that the fog may lift, and we will have the courage to peer through the darkness until we have found illumination.

Above all, grant grace to those who stumble and find fault with themselves and others.

Your mercy, as Julian knew, is abundant and everlasting. Let us not dwell too long on the pains we have caused ourselves and others and that leave us crippled.

May our steps be steady in the darkness. And the illumination to come to be a shared vision for all people.

May it be so. Amen.

The Spirituality of Live Music

So, last Sunday afternoon Bruce and I hosted an outside distance concert in our gardens, which, those of you who attended will know, was wonderful. Some of you will remember Nathan Smith, who has played a concert at Trinity with the Barrel Boys and also come to play with Bruce at a couple of fundraisers at the Grace Tipling Hall. Nathan has been doing some recording with traditional fiddler and composer Emilyn Stam this last year, along with clarinetist John David Williams and bassist and poet, Allan Machie. And there all were, gathered in the late afternoon on our back patio in the crisp autumn air and they enchanted us all.

I was thinking as they offered up their splendid array of musical gifts, of our theme from last week's podcast: Love is the conduit to the miraculous. We were talking about love in the context of Mary weeping outside of Jesus' tomb. But love comes in many forms, and the thought still applies, for as Nathan, Emilyn, Allan and John gently tossed us treasure after treasure from their collective, and carefully curated bag of goodies, it seemed nothing short of miraculous that we should sit then in the beatify of the setting sun, and be the fortunate recipients of all the love they had poured into their calling. It was perhaps the easy grace with which they gifted us, so seemingly unaware of the potency of presence they had created. In between

songs they spoke of places they had gone to ferret out centuries old scores of rondeaus and bourrées, waltzes and mazurkas. And I wondered at the love they hold for their life's work, and the sacredness of all they did, and all they offered.

We talk often of spiritual practices. Anything done with love and intent and a desire to see beauty within this world and within ourselves, is a spiritual practice, a sacredness. To be receivers of another's spiritual practice, is to be blessed by it. So, here with their permission, is a tune called, Honeywood written and performed by Emilyn and John. They have been much blessed by the community near Honeywood and offer this lovely waltz as thank you to the area that inspired its creation. Close your eyes and imagine a garden with real musicians playing for your pleasure.

Music: *Honeywood/Un Soir (Waltz)* Composers/Artists: Emilyn Stam, John David Williams

First Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 16: 18 – 20

This last week, you will have noted that Ruth Bader Ginsberg, the celebrated and much loved American supreme court judge has been lying in state, while she is smothered in accolades from those who knew and worked with her, and those who simply watched from afar as she followed her lifetime calling to administer justice.

Born into the Jewish faith, Ruth took early exception to the rules of her tradition. The ever thoughtful folks at SALT drew this to my attention – that when Celia, Ruth's mother, died of cancer just two days shy of Ruth's graduation from high school, Ruth was not allowed to pray the mourner's prayer for her mother because in keeping with Jewish custom in those days, only men could be counted as part of a minyan or quorum - (a rule since changed in both Reform and Conservative Judaism). Ruth was both heartbroken and outraged - and as a result, felt alienated from synagogue membership for much of the rest of her life.

But Ruth was born and bred on the Tanach, the Hebrew scriptures, and hanging on the wall of her court chambers, was a quote from Deuteronomy 16: 20. Justice, justice, only justice you shall pursue." Here is the larger context of that brief

phrase. It comes after the Jewish people have been freed from slavery and are setting up their new community of faith.

¹⁸ You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. ¹⁹ You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

Ruth Bader Ginsberg made a great effort in her life to uphold that scripture. She may not have always been popular, her decisions not always applauded, but her internal compass was set true north, and she did not deviate from her devotion to bringing justice to those who were without advocates in the halls of power. Her presence on this earth will be missed.

The scriptures are rich in wonder at the natural gifts of this earth. Our response, seen well in the psalms, is awe and wonder. Everything God wishes to teach us can be found in a toadstool. Though we so often crush it under our feet without notice. When we do, notice, we have entered the land of the miraculous. For just as love is conduit for the miraculous, so is wonder and awe.

Music: God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale

God of the sparrow
God of the whale
God of the swirling stars
How does the creature say Awe
How does the creature say Praise

God of the earthquake
God of the storm
God of the trumpet blast
How does the creature cry Woe
How does the creature cry Save

God of the rainbow
God of the cross
God of the empty grave
How does the creature say Grace
How does the creature say Thanks

God of the hungry
God of the sick
God of the prodigal
How does the creature say Care
How does the creature say Life

God of the neighbour
God of the foe
God of the pruning hook
How does the creature say Love
How does the creature say Peace

God of the ages
God near at hand
God of the loving heart
How do your children say Joy
How do your children say Home

Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

And here is the scripture for this Sunday from the lectionary.

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say

to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” So, they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

“What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you; the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

What is this changing of the mind, that Jesus speaks about? What is this belief that Jesus refers to? In both the riddle that he poses to the elders, and the parable he tells, the idea of turning around and changing directions is central.

The repentance in John the Baptist’s teaching is this same journey, repent simply meaning to change direction, to turn around.

It was a simple teaching, born and bred deep in spirit of the Hebrew faith into which both of them were born. Though at the time the two young cousins, John and Jesus lived, that core idea has become distorted.

It called upon people to be on a continual journey of exploration and renewal. It saw the spiritual aspect of life as a wandering, unfolding, narrative of discovery.

Think on your own spiritual life. Is what you now hold to be true and important the same as those things you held to be true as a child? I am hoping that some things have held steady, but other details perhaps of your life of faith, have altered, been reevaluated, reconsidered. I am hoping they have enlarged.

Look at this scripture and see the movement in it. The winding road. According to Matthew, the Palm Sunday parade as we know it, has ended with Jesus turning the

tables upside down in the temple. He has disrupted the endless flow of cash that is flowing through the temple on the week of Passover and will end up largely in the pockets of the chief priests and their municipal counterparts, Pilot and his Roman court. Somebody's head is going to roll. Trouble is on its way.

And so, it is they come to Jesus and say to him, by what authority are you able to do this? They, the chief priests and elders are the ones that hold authority amongst the Jewish people. Not some itinerant preacher with a rag tag group of followers.

Jesus responds with a thought exercise. He is pressing them to think, hoping perhaps that they can find it within themselves to think outside the neat and tidy box of self-preservation and institutionalized temple thinking that has come to represent the once vibrant Hebrew tradition.

But they cannot.

They are only able to spend their effort trying to figure out the answer as though it were a riddle to trap them, to catch them at their own underhanded game. Jesus is not interested in trapping them. He has no need. He is trying to enlighten them. He is trying to get them to explore new possibilities outside the dualistic thinking in which they are trapped.

We often refer to morals in the Christian faith. But Jesus did not teach moral codes. In fact, he broke most if not all of the moral rules of the culture in which he lived and was quite content to leave the Decalogue just as it had been written some time earlier – rules for living happily in community you might call the ten commandants.

Jesus was not interested in saddling people with more rules. That was already well in play by the Pharisees and Sadducees. He wanted people to reconsider the way things were. He wanted them to be people of faith – not a faith that bound them to a particular code of ethics. Not a faith that bound them to a particular doctrine and created clubs of those inside the neatly defined box and those outside it.

He wanted everyone to have a little faith in the goodness of things. In the mercy of god. In the largess, the expansiveness, the generosity of the great spirit that is

always revealing new ways of being, new understandings of what it means to be human, new ways of understanding what is divine.

He wanted them to have a faith that existed outside particular buildings. Outside specialized ritual and language. He wanted them to consider his thoughts, not because he knew more than they did, but because he was willing to question what no longer felt like truth. Even if it was taught by his elders. Even if it was said to be sacrosanct.

And I wonder how the narrative might have gone, had the chief priests been less interested in the complicated flow of goods and money from the people to their own coffers and the defense of an oppressive system of government held in place by the violence inflicted by the Roman army should anyone question the status quo and a little more interested in the well fare of others, and of themselves. Might they not have been able to really listen to what Jesus was teaching and heard that he was calling them to unburden themselves from the evil in which they were entrapped, calling them to simply turn away from the dark path down which they were headed and which kept them separated from others.

Separation, our separation from one another, separation from the natural world and its generous spirit, separation from the divine force that flows freely among us, is always the evil that is afoot. We have faith, when we see it for what it is, and instead of drawing back turn to find the goodness and grace and love, beating in the heart of the other. This is faith. And it makes of fear a plaything, easily tossed aside, that we might dwell in the infinite richness of the sacred.

May we have the faith of our wise anchoress, Julian of Norwich, who surrounded by the death of the black plague, and facing her own personal death had a heart fluid enough to receive the message of faith which held her steady the rest of her life, “All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.”

Musical Response: *Have a Little Faith in Me*, Music/Lyrics: John Hiatt, Artists: Candice Bist, Bruce Ley

When the road gets dark
And you can no longer see

Just let my love throw a spark
And have a little faith in me

And when the tears you cry
Are all you can believe
Just give the way of love a try,
And have a little faith in me

And
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me

When your secret heart
Cannot speak so easily
Come here and
From a whisper start
To have a little faith in me

And when your back's against the wall
Just turn around and you will see
I will catch, I will catch your fall
Just have a little faith in me

Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me

Announcements

As there was last week, there will be an indoor service at Primrose United Church this Sunday, September 27th, at 10 am. Please come early so as to observe all the protocols that have been put in place in order that we may gather. Trinity is

planning on offering on site Sunday worship on Thanksgiving weekend, but as always, we will be following the provincial regulations, and if there is any change in status around gathering in church buildings, we will post that on our website.

Your search committee continues to work heart to find a new minister for the new year, and we offer then our constant support and prayers as their prayerful search for new leadership here at Shelburne Primrose.

I have seen and heard in a conversation here and there, the kindnesses you have been offering, the gentle words of encouragement you share with one another. This is the way forward, in gentleness and goodness and grace. The smallest of gestures can have huge import. You know this well from your own lives.

So, I offer you in closing a tender little prayer from the Christian Celtic tradition.

And I leave it to Nathan Smith to send us all on our way with a tune he wrote called Market Day from his newly released CD, Let it Rest, Let it Rise. The merry band that played for us all on Sunday are all avid sourdough bread makers – I managed to snag some of Nathan’s sourdough starter - yum – and following in the traditional way, Nathan has incorporated his life into the life of this song.

Nathan, Emilyn and Alan are playing on this tune, along with Hannah Shira Naiman on banjo and vocals, and Anh Phung on mandolin and vocals. Bruce and I thought the style of this tune really suited the area in which we live, so, thank you again to Nathan, Alan, John and Emilyn for sharing your gift of music, as it was live, and as we hear it here recorded.

Blessings to all, this week, and in the weeks to come,

Dear Lord,
Give me a few friends
who will love me for what I am,
and keep ever burning
before my vagrant steps
the kindly light of hope...
And though I come not within sight

of the castle of my dreams,
teach me to be thankful for life,
and for time's olden memories
that are good and sweet.
And may the evening's twilight
find me gentle still.

Market Day, Music/Lyrics: Nathan Smith,

With Grateful Thanks To:

Nathan Smith

Emilyn Stam

John David Williams

Alan Mackie