

***All Earth is Waiting, Music: Alberto Taule, Lyrics: Alberto Taule, trans. Gertrude Suppe, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist***

All earth is waiting to see the Promised One,  
and open furrows await the seed of God.  
All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true liberty;  
it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.

Thus says the prophet to those of Israel:  
'A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel,'  
one whose name is 'God with us' our Saviour shall be;  
with him hope will blossom once more within our hearts.

Mountains and valleys will have to be made plain;  
open new highways, new highways for the Lord.  
He is now coming closer, so come all and see,  
and open the doorways as wide as wide can be.

In lowly stable the Promised One appeared;  
yet feel his presence throughout the earth today,  
for he lives in all people and is with us now;  
again, with his coming he brings us liberty.

**Welcome**

Peace be with you this snowy week in the season of Christmastide, and welcome to the twelve days of Christmas, and to my final series of podcasts for all of you listening. I am hoping you all had some time of quiet and peace on Christmas Day. Though it is not the usual Christmas season we have perhaps had in the past, always there are things to be grateful for, and sometimes, quiet, and rest, are as much needed, as communal celebration.

I am Rev. Dr. Candice Bist and along with my husband Bruce Ley, we have together been serving the Shelburne Primrose Pastoral Charge for five years. But my time with all of you is coming to a close at the end of this year, though some of my administrative work trails into January and Bruce will be staying on as musical director as long as you are in need of him.

While I was pondering how to say goodbye to you all, Bruce suggested that I share all that I have learned in our time together – an excellent suggestion. But on reflecting on this over the Advent and Christmas season, there seemed to be so many things to chat about. In addition, I asked

Bruce to put together a mix of all the music we have done over the 39 podcasts we have produced since last March. Turned out, that was quite a few songs.

So, here is what I came up with. As my farewell to you, we have put together a final series of three podcasts of our music interspersed with things I wanted to tell you or thought you might like to hear about. The first podcast is a collection of my favourite scriptures, ones that are foundational to my own spiritual journey, and will have undergirded all that I have taught you. The second podcast is a reflective look at the key theological matters of import in our faith today. And the final podcast is about what you have taught me personally as a minister, and my thoughts on the future of the church. I hope they offer you times of reflection, but also courage for the journey ahead. As your wonderful search committee continues to seek out new spiritual leadership, remember that you, each and every one of you, is the heart of the church, and our physical buildings do not need to be open in order for the gospel to be alive and well in the community.

Bruce is going to sing our opening prayer.

***O God Our Help in Ages Past*, Music: St. Anne, traditional tune, Lyrics: Issac Watts, Arranger/Artist: Bruce Ley**

Oh God, our help in ages past  
 Our hope for years to come  
 Our shelter from the stormy blast  
 And our eternal home.

Under the shadow of thy throne  
 Thy saints have dwelt secure  
 Sufficient is thine arm alone  
 And our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood  
 All Earth received its frame  
 From everlasting thou' art God  
 To endless years the same.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream  
 Soon bears us all away,  
 We fly, forgotten, as a dream  
 Dies at the opening day.

Oh God, our help in ages past  
Our hope for years to come  
Be thou' our guide while troubles last  
And our eternal home

## **Introduction**

I have to tell you that I just love to hear Bruce playing and singing the traditional hymns – they are the ones he likes the best, being a bit of a traditionalist, my Bruce. I don't know if any of you have listened in church while a spouse or friend beside you in the pew was singing a hymn, it is a rather personal, touching experience, to hear another sing their faith, don't you think?

When I chose the scriptures that came to me right away, my go to scriptures as it were, the ones whose numbers make up my bank account codes, the ones I know by heart, I was surprised to see that they were almost all from the Hebrew scriptures, what we often, though erroneously I might add, refer to as the Old Testament. And none were from the Gospels. But as you will see next week, when we chat about important theologies in our faith, that is because I see the gospels as a whole and think of them not so much in individual scriptures as narrative, stories I hold dear, and somehow a great, colourfully woven cloth that surrounds the person of Jesus. To pick at threads in this sacred tapestry has never been my desire, only to wrap myself in the wholeness, and beauty of its fabric.

I begin with Psalm 139, verses 1 – 18, 23, 24. If you want to know why I cut out those couple of verses in-between, you can look up the specifics yourself. But suffice it to say, I am not interested in the winning part where the psalmist commissions God to do terrible things to his enemies. You might call that a Jesus infused prejudice, and that is fine with me. After all, this is my list of top tens, or in this case, top six, and I may choose what I will.

I discovered this scripture at seminary, somehow never having registered it before hand, though certainly I must have read it, or heard it read before. It highlights for me the simple, important and key fact that I am known and loved by this great mystery we have had the audacity to name. When we get ourselves in trouble, we have forgotten this simple fact. This scripture brings back the fulness of divine love, and our personal responsibility to accept that love, and live accordingly.

## **Psalm 139 1 – 18, 23, 24**

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup>You search out my path and my lying down,

and are acquainted with all my ways.  
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,  
    O Lord, you know it completely.  
5 You hem me in, behind and before,  
    and lay your hand upon me.  
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
    it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
7 Where can I go from your spirit?  
    Or where can I flee from your presence?  
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
    if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
9 If I take the wings of the morning  
    and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10 even there your hand shall lead me,  
    and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
    and the light around me become night,”  
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;  
    the night is as bright as the day,  
    for darkness is as light to you.  
13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
    Wonderful are your works;  
    that I know very well.  
15 My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
    all the days that were formed for me,  
    when none of them as yet existed.  
17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
    How vast is the sum of them!  
18 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
    I come to the end<sup>[a]</sup>—I am still with you.  
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
    test me and know my thoughts.  
24 See if there is any wicked<sup>[e]</sup> way in me,  
    and lead me in the way everlasting.

***I Have Called You by Your Name*, Music/Lyrics: Daniel Charles Damon, Arranger: Bruce Ley, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**

I have called you by your name, you are mine;  
I have gifted you and ask you now to shine.  
I will not abandon you;  
all my promises are true.  
You are gifted, called, and chosen; you are mine.

I will help you learn my name as you go;  
read it written in my people, help them grow.  
Pour the water in my name,  
speak the word your soul can claim,  
offer Jesus' body, given long ago.

I know you will need my touch as you go;  
feel it pulsing in creation's ebb and flow.  
Like the woman reaching out,  
choosing faith in spite of doubt,  
hold the hem of Jesus' robe, then let it go.

I have given you a name, it is mine;  
I have given you my Spirit as a sign.  
With my wonder in your soul,  
make my wounded children whole;  
go and tell my precious people they are mine.

**Introduction to Lamentations Scripture**

I have lived with the presence and aliveness of God for so long I find it almost unfathomable that people deny this existence. But deny it they do, though so often I think what people deny when they say they don't believe in the existence of God, is the existence of a small, little God that has been placed in a tiny box with many rules around it, and usually, with the heavy stamp of a particular doctrine upon it.

Because when people talk about what they love, or what gives them life, you can hear the divine Tinkerbell laugh gently in the background of their conversation. God does not need to be in bold letters in a conversation, the divine is so certain of its existence, it does not need to be front and centre in dialogue to be acknowledged. That is a particularly human trait.

It is the steadfast, humbleness of God, that astonishes – that something so immense, so powerful, so full and past our imaginings could take interest in the smallest details of our lives. How can that be? And yet, I am certain that it is. The steadfastness, and the mercy of God, never fail to stagger me with their enormity. And every day, every day, every moment, every breath, the mercy, unending, the chances to begin again, and again, with no recriminations that is no human at all, that is what divinity is. “Your mercies are new every morning” is so often my astonished thought. . . . . It is best expressed in Lamentations, though it is found also in the psalms, and also in my all-time most favourite hymn.

**Lamentations 3: 22, 23**

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,<sup>[a]</sup>  
 his mercies never come to an end;  
<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;  
 great is your faithfulness.

***Great is Thy Faithfulness*, Music: William M. Runyan, Words: Thomas O. Chisholm,  
 Artist: Candice Bist**

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
 there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
 thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;  
 as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness!  
 Great is thy faithfulness!  
 Morning by morning new mercies I see:  
 all I have needed thy hand hath provided--  
 Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
 sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
 join with all nature in manifold witness  
 to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
 thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,  
 strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
 blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! [Refrain]

## **Introduction to Micah Scripture**

The scriptures are enormous in their ambition, overwhelming in length and complexity. And the prophets in particular do tend to go on and on. My failing too, sometimes, so I am somewhat sympathetic. Isaiah for heaven sakes goes on talking for three centuries. Goodness.

So, it is delightful when you find a passage that sums everything up, and I don't think anyone does that quite as beautifully as our country prophet Micah. This scripture was chosen as the text for my commissioning, which in the Presbyterian tradition is the service offered at the first church where you are called as an ordained minister. And the person who chooses the text, and preaches on it, is the minister who was ordained just before you. The wonderful Rev. Dr. Heather Melnick chose this scripture and preached on it. She chose it especially for me as representing my calling as a minister. So, I hold it in high esteem, partly because it was a great gift personally, and also, because it simplifies our calling to something, we can all do.

## **Micah 6:6 - 8**

### **What God Requires**

<sup>6</sup>“With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

<sup>8</sup>He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

### ***Just a Closer Walk with Thee, Music/Lyrics: traditional, Artist: Bruce Ley***

I am weak but Thou art strong  
Jesus keep me from all wrong  
I'll be satisfied as long  
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee

Just a closer walk with Thee  
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea

Daily walking close to Thee  
 Let it be, dear Lord, let it be

When my feeble life is o'er  
 Time for me will be no more  
 Guide me gently, safely o'er  
 To Thy kingdom's shore, to Thy shore

Just a closer walk with Thee  
 Grant it, Jesus, is my plea  
 Daily walking close to Thee  
 Let it be, dear Lord, let it be

### **Introduction to Job: 38 – 41**

Job is the oldest book in The Bible, scholars' guesstimate it was written between the 7<sup>th</sup> and fourth century before Jesus was born. Old. All three of my children discovered when they went to the same liberal arts collect, that the Book of Job was where their yearlong course in literature began. They were stunned that something from the Bible was the starting place for their secular education. I have to tell you it was personally amusing that having left home to be educated, their first calls home were requests for my seminary knowledge on this ancient text.

The book of job way back then, addresses the same question that we are faced with today, and in particular perhaps, in the midst of the Cov-id 19 pandemic. It attempts to answer the question: Why is there evil in the world? And what is the relationship between this evil and people and God? The bottom-line answer for that, according to the book of Job is that is none of our business, because we are creatures and God is not a creature and knows things we can't know. We are to avoid being evil and leave the larger questions to the divine mind more qualified to understand these matters.

What I love about Job is not in the first thirty-seven chapters.. There Job grovels and his friends talk in endless conversations that go round and round in circles. All Job's children die terrible deaths as do his cattle and fields and houses and everything else he owns. Job's wife has unquestionably the best one liner in the entire Bible when in the midst of all the long conversation and the stink of failure and death, she simply says to her husband, "Curse God and die."

But it is not those chapters that hold my interest, it is chapters 38 – 41, when after all this carry on, the writer of the book brings God in to speak. And for three chapters the divine voice speaks in a flowing poetic style of the many mysteries of this world that are unknown to us. In some



ways, though it is an ancient writing, it feels modern. Because as scientists explore new territories as they must do, they discover, alongside the philosophers, that the more they uncover, the more they are confounded by the intricacies, the beauty, the immensity of intelligence that links together the universe and everything in it. Here in the oldest book in the Bible, is a lyrical rendering of the beauty of this world, and the importance of understanding its value. It is, in my way of thinking, the Christian manifesto for all matters environmental. Here in the first 11 verses of chapter 38, is a taste of its wholeness.

**Job 38: 1 - 11**

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

<sup>2</sup>“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

<sup>3</sup>Gird up your loins like a man,

I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

<sup>4</sup>“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

<sup>5</sup>Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

<sup>6</sup>On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone

<sup>7</sup>when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings<sup>[a]</sup> shouted for joy?

<sup>8</sup>“Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst out from the womb?—

<sup>9</sup>when I made the clouds its garment,

and thick darkness its swaddling band,

<sup>10</sup>and prescribed bounds for it,

and set bars and doors,

<sup>11</sup>and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,

and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?

***God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale, Music/Lyrics: Jaroslav J. Vajda, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist***

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

### **Introduction to the last of the scriptures**

And in conclusion, I would say that it is a collection of Paul the Apostle's short little phrases, and two small paragraphs from his correspondence that direct me personally. They are like little slogans, or mantras, that are imbedded deeply in my mind, and for this I am grateful. I was never overly fond of Paul and his teachings, until I came to understand that he was really just an ambitious lawyer that underwent a profound life changing spiritual experience and thereafter for the rest of his life he was trying to figure that all out. We all these years later, have embedded those writings in stone, and I am sure he would be horrified about such a thing, as he was trying

to think his theology out, working on it as he went, with no intention of us holding it under a magnifying glass and claiming it as sacrosanct.

But he was so devoted in his calling, so staggeringly honest about his failures and stumbling's, embarrassed even, by his own boastfulness, that it is impossible not to come to enjoy his company after a time, and to feel safe within it, even if you don't follow all his intricate theological manoeuvring. He got a few things consistently right and they are so helpful to the rest of us stumbling along with him.

In first Thessalonians, thought to be the first letter he wrote to an emerging group of Christian followers, he writes, simply.

### **1 Thessalonians 5: 16,17,18**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances.

### **Philippians 4: 11**

for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to **be content**.

### **And Philippians 4: - 8**

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice<sup>[a]</sup> in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved,<sup>[c]</sup> 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<sup>[d]</sup> these things.

You will remember that on the Third Sunday of Advent, we spoke of the importance of joyfulness in our life, joy being born of a deep vein of gratitude that runs through us. It is a good reminder to us that joy lives within us always, running below the sorrows and irritations of the day. Remember this, during Christmastide.

Stay well, and be safe. As of last night, we are in a 28-day lockdown in Ontario, and it is important to take this seriously. I know it can be difficult for many, for those living alone, or those who struggle with the darkness this time of the year. So, reach out when you need to, call those whom you think about, and remember that prayer and singing and the reading of scriptures is available to you at all times as a source of inspiration, and joy.

I will continue with the second part of this, my final three-part podcast series, next week.

Every blessing to you this day, and all days.

***I Saw the Light*, Music and Lyrics: Hank Williams, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**

I wandered so aimless, life filled with sin  
 I wouldn't let my dear saviour in  
 Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light

I saw the light I saw the light  
 no more darkness, no more night  
 Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light

Just like a blind man I wandered along  
 Worries and fears I claimed for my own  
 Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light

I saw the light I saw the light  
 no more darkness, no more night  
 Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light

I was a fool to wander and stray  
 straight is the gate, and narrow's the way  
 Now I have traded the wrong for the right  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light

I saw the light I saw the light  
 no more darkness, no more night  
 Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light  
 I saw the light I saw the light  
 no more darkness, no more night  
 Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight  
 Praise the Lord, I saw  
 Praise the Lord, I saw  
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light