

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

## **Welcome**

Peace be with you, this very moment in your breath. Ruah, the Hebrew word for breath, is the same word for spirit, and in this ancient tradition, breath and spirit are one. This is why we have that metaphorical picture of God breathing the world into existence, animating everything with divine breath. And that is a good image to keep in mind, as we come through another wild week of uncertainty in the midst of the shifting weather of autumn and the approaching cold of winter.

I am Rev. Dr. Candice Bist and along with my husband, Bruce Ley, we serve the Shelburne Primrose Pastoral Charge in southern Ontario, which consists of two United Churches. Like all of you we have been negotiating our way through the daily realities of the Cov-id 19nPandemic, which is entering its second wave. We head into the Thanksgiving Season – with all of its memories of gathered families and celebration – with uncertainty, and the natural disappointment of not being able to gather in large groups as we once did.

In our Christian tradition, this Sunday is Worldwide Communion Day, a Sunday set aside where each denomination celebrates the Eucharist in its own way, but in solidarity with all others who attempt to follow in the way of love as taught and lived out by Jesus. And yet, for health and safety reasons, we are not allowed to have a communion service in the way we once did. But it may be, that in not doing so in the usual way, we can consider how the practice of Christian communion, so particular to one religion, is really in service to the greater good of all people, regardless of religious affiliations one way or the other. And how, when we choose to see the hand of the divine in all things, communion takes place at the breakfast table, whether you are all alone, or with a gaggle of noisy children.

So, no great gatherings around the turkey dinner, no traditional communion church gatherings, and then add to this the recent memory of the appalling display of world leaders behaving like school yard children and now the further uncertainty concerning the health of the leader of the United States and his wife, and the inevitable uneven stock market, it is no surprise that we are all feeling a little unsettled this week.

Perhaps that is all the more reason why we gather for some contemplative time apart – and yet together – that we may turn to our faith for the wisdom that is evading us in common culture and hard to seek in the headlines.

Sabbath, you will remember, is an atmosphere which we enter, voluntarily, that we may rest from the weary press of the world, let go of the will to shift and change the world, and

concentrate instead, on the shifting and changing of our internal landscape – we concern ourselves on the Sabbath, with our soul. And as we consider our own soul, so we aid and uplift the collective soul of the world.

This week we continue on into the season of creation, learning from St. Francis of Assisi, a saint in the Catholic tradition, and by an odd coincidence, we are also touching on Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, and the many layers of fascinating story around the song written in her name. Jesus brings us also the parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard as we consider the way of the human mind when it allows itself to be separated from God, the divine mind.

So, in the Sabbath tradition, I ask you to leave behind for the moment the troubles of the world – and I do know they are many, for even this week, with the thought of not being able to see my own children for some time, I have found myself stumbling – and I need the comfort of Sabbath time, just as you do. It is a great gift, The Sabbath, Sabbath time, time set aside to rest from the onslaught of all around us. The sheer velocity and force of the world can tire us. So, here we have a quiet place to rest ourselves, and be refreshed. I do so hope and pray, that our time together offers you some healing from the week's bruising. Make me tender again, has been the prayer of many. It is my prayer this week, and my prayer for you, that yes, even in the midst of the roughness of this world, our request to God, is be make us tender hearted, sweet to ourselves and the world, ever ready to reach out with compassion to whoever calls to us.

***For the Fruits of All Creation, Writer: Fred Pratt Green, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist***

For the fruit(s) of all creation,  
 thanks be to God;  
 for the gifts of every nation,  
 thanks be to God;  
 for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,  
 silent growth while we are sleeping,  
 future needs in earth's safe keeping,  
 thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour,  
 God's will is done;  
 in the help we give our neighbour,  
 God's will is done;  
 in our world-wide task of caring  
 for the hungry and despairing,  
 in the harvests we are sharing,  
 God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit,  
thanks be to God;  
for the good we all inherit,  
thanks be to God;  
for the wonders that astound us,  
for the truths that still confound us,  
most of all that love has found us,  
thanks be to God.

### **Call to Worship/Opening Prayer**

Patron Saints are common in many faith traditions, but in the Christian tradition, they are mostly associated with the Catholic branch of our faith. A patron saint is a person who has been deemed by the church a heavenly advocate, a person with particular gifts of the spirit that provide a conduit to God. Once a saint is formally designated as such, then cities, or guilds or places of learning, may adopt them as their own patron saint. Often a saint is a patron of the place they were born, or performed miracles, or are in some way associated with a profession. St. Honoree, for example, is the patron sake of bakers and confectioners. That is because the baker's guild of Paris— which we all know to be the centre of excellent confections – first met together in a chapel for St. Honoree back in the 1700's, and thus adopted him as their patron saint, naming their famous St. Honoree cake in his honour.

St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of Italy, animals, nature, the darling of all those involved in environmental concerns. Francis was born in Assisi, Italy. He loved the natural world, seeing animals and the elements as his brothers and sisters. It is fitting that our creation season falls within the time of his special feast day, October 4<sup>th</sup>. St. Francis's family were wealthy merchants and he was well educated, reading and writing profusely. But it was from nature that he drew his inspiration to praise god through the beauty of creation. Our call to worship is from St. Francis' most famous writing – Brother Sun, Sister moon. And the very short prayer that follows was his daily, continual prayer –may it be ours also.

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my lord Brother Sun,  
who brings the day; and you give light through him.

And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather through which  
You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful  
and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord,  
through those who give pardon for Your love,  
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace  
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord,  
through our Sister Bodily Death,  
from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.  
Blessed are those who will  
find Your most holy will,  
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord,  
and give Him thanks  
and serve Him with great humility

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Most High, glorious God,  
Enlighten the darkness of my heart  
And give me

True faith,  
Certain hope,  
And perfect charity,  
Sense and knowledge,  
Lord that I may carry out your holy and true command. Amen.

***Musical Interlude***

**Spiritual Practice of Patron Saints – and of Listening for who and when and where that might be....**

In this time when meeting together is getting more and more problematical, our personal spiritual practices increase in importance. Spiritual practices are for the purpose of training us to be more tender-hearted, our faith to be firmer and stronger, and our general constitution to find peacefulness, even as we build our courage for the challenges that we face, and that we face on behalf of other people.

Conferring with various saints, thinkers, theologians, those who consider the deeper questions in our tradition, and in others, is always time well spent. Those who have spent their time communing deeply with the source of love and compassion, and grounded goodness, bless all those who come close to them by a kind of spiritual osmosis.

Saints and patrons come in many forms, and you may think on your own life to realize that you also have personal patrons. They may not be venerated by the church, or by history or culture, but in your world, they have provided patronage – support - emotional, financial, intellectual, spiritual.

It is a good spiritual practice to you bring to your mind the many people who have gifted you with their love, attention and instruction over the years. And having brought their faces to you, you relax and accept the simple goodness that is their wish for you. It is a humbling process, and one that will fill you with gratitude.

It is fascinating to consider that when you look at another person, you only see one face, when in truth there are thousands of faces that allowed the one face to exist.

I have had a real, venerated, honest to goodness saint pop up in my life this last few weeks, that was very unexpected, and came to me through a song that kept repeating in my head until I went into the studio to record it. I did not know why exactly at the time – Bruce was very puzzled, as at first hearing it seems a simple song from the seventies, Song of Bernadette, written by Jennifer Warren, Leonard Cohen, and Bill Elliott. But, as it turns out, it is a song with much to teach us all, at many different levels.

**Musical Interlude – Song of Bernadette, Writers: Jennifer Warren, Leonard Cohen, Bill Elliott, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist**

Let's start with St. Bernadette, referred to in the title of the song. She was born in Lourdes into poverty, and what might have been obscurity in 1844. But at the age of 14 she experienced a series of visions wherein she heard and conversed with Mary, the mother of Jesus. She would sit by a particular grotto in a trance, and afterwards be able to relay very clear experiences and instructions from Mary. Quite naturally, there were many in her family and in the church, who repudiated these visions. After all, she was poor, uneducated at the time, of little consequence according to the common measurements of the time – though you may all observe that those were ways of measuring and categorizing that Jesus did not indulge in.

But no matter who questioned Bernadette about her visions, she held her ground and would not give them up, eventually moving into a convent for quiet and privacy – she was not a physically strong person – to spend the rest of her life in prayer and devotion. She was beloved for her kindness, gentleness and devotion to others. The church eventually recognized the power of Bernadette's experience, and she was canonized. At Bernadette's instructions, the Marian Shrine of Lourdes, was built and it is now a major pilgrimage site to over five million visitors a year, those seeking healing, consolation, and simply to be touched by the purity of Bernadette's spirit.

Now, Jennifer Warren, the main writer of this song, was travelling in the south of France near Lourdes in the late 70's when she penned the poignant lyrics. Jennifer was struggling to find her way back to a place of purity, to leave behind a life that had become increasingly worldly. And she was drawn to the figure of St. Bernadette as someone who held their ground under difficult circumstances. But there was another reason she was drawn to the name Bernadette.

In an interview after the song's release she tells this story:

"I was given the name Bernadette at birth. But my siblings preferred the name "Jennifer", so my name was changed one week later. In 1979, on tour in the south of France with Leonard Cohen, I began writing a series of letters between the "Bernadette" I almost was, and "Jennifer"—two energies within me. One innocent, and the other who had fallen for the world.... So, the song arose in a bus nearby Lourdes. I was...thinking about the great Saint who held her ground so well and was not swayed from what she knew to be true. But the song is also about me longing to return to a place that was more pure, honest and true. I still long for this, and I think others do too."

But here is yet another layer I discovered about this song. The song's title is taken from the name of a novel written about St. Bernadette's life by Franz Werfel – a very successful novel that was then made into an academy award winning film in the mid-forties starring Jennifer Jones as

Bernadette. Franz wrote the novel, as a response to a vow he had made some years earlier. He was a Czechoslovakian Jew living Austria when the Germans invaded that country. He and his wife escaped to France, seeking safe passage to the United States. In the last days of 1940, hunted by the Gestapo, Franz were directed to the town of Lourdes where they found sanctuary with people who protected them, keeping them safe. And during that time, the people told the couple the story of Bernadette, a beloved figure who they felt was offering protection during their time of need. Franz vowed that if he ever escaped safely and reached America, he would not do anything else until he had written the story of Bernadette. Which he did.

So, many layers there.... a young girl, Bernadette, who encounters another young girl from another time, Mary, both who endure trials where they are discounted, but both endure to bring comfort to others. From their courage and devotion to God, a sense of wellness and healing clusters around the town of Lourdes. Perhaps it encourages people to stand up for their beliefs and not to bow to the evils that are infiltrating the countryside. And so they hide and care for a Jewish couple, not knowing how it will all turn out. The Jewish couple escape, and the writer writes a tribute to the Bernadette he has heard about while in hiding. The novel uplifts many people, and then becomes a film that is much loved, and much venerated, in the way tis namesake was. And then years later a young woman feeling she has lost her way in the world but finding herself in Lourdes is reminded that her birth name was Bernadette and finds within her artistry a way to write about her own struggle and Bernadette's.

And I, listening to this song that will not stop repeating itself, am also uplifted by the song, the story of the song, the story of Franz – all to remind me – who can then remind you – that it is important to. Listen. To listen to the quiet instructions that come to us.....to the strength and wisdom within us, the divine spark that can comfort us, and hold us steady.....

We may not be able to physical hold one another these days, but we can hold people in our minds, bring them to our consciousness, neighbours and friends and saints and sinners alike, and bless them, love them, value them. That is the deepest of spiritual work. May it keep you well occupied in the days ahead.

*There was a child named Bernadette  
I heard the story long ago  
She saw the Queen of Heaven once  
And kept the vision in her soul  
No one believed what she had seen  
No one believed what she heard  
But there were sorrows to be here  
And mercy, mercy in this world*

*So many hearts I find, broke like yours and mine  
Torn by what we've done and can't undo  
I just want to hold you, come on let me hold you  
Like Bernadette would do*

*We've been around, we fall, we fly  
We mostly fall, we mostly run  
And every now and then we try  
To mend the damage that we've done  
Tonight, tonight I just can't rest  
I've got this joy inside my breast  
To think that I did not forget that child  
That song of Bernadette*

*So many hearts I find, broke like yours and mine  
Torn by what we've done and can't undo  
I just want to hold you, won't let me hold you  
Like Bernadette would do  
I just want to hold you, come on let me hold you  
Like Bernadette would do*

### **Musical Interlude**

Our scripture reading today continues on from last week in the book of Matthew, as Jesus finds himself approaching his trial and death. You can hear and feel the rising tension between the approach Jesus is taking to religion and the approach that is being used at the temple during his time. As a writer, Matthew is setting up the battle between the existing empire and the emerging revolution, between the chief priests and the Romans and Jesus and his band of followers, between the way of violence and the way of peace.

### **Scripture Reading: Matthew 21: 33 - 46**

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So, they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put



those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;<sup>[a]</sup>  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes’?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.<sup>[b]</sup> The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”<sup>[c]</sup>

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

### **Reflection**

This parable can be studied and interpreted in many ways. That is the beauty of the scriptures – their complexity. They are always open to new understanding, as we progress through history and come to understand what it means to be human, moving as we do in the world through different cultures, different worldviews, and the internal swirling’s of each person’s reading within their own narrative, their own story, their own time in history.

So, if you think back to the time that the King James Bible was written, readers would have heard this story and simply accepted the idea that the landowner had the land and he could pretty much do what he wanted – that the tenants, the slaves, even his own son – were there to be bent to his will, there to serve his purposes. Because that was the way the world worked for people hearing the story. The king and the lords had the land. Everyone else worked for them.

And, it followed, in this thinking, that if the story was about God, then God was the landowner, because, well, God created everything so therefore he was the ultimate landlord, and he could do pretty much what he wanted. Our job was to serve God. And no attention would have been given as to what kind of God was being served, because God was seen as all powerful, male, war like and within his rights therefore to treat people as he wished.

And this is, how the religious leaders in the time of Jesus, interpret the parable – they fully concede that if the tenants are not compliant, then the landlord has every right to be harsh, and to kill the tenants.

LeeAnn recently reminded me of the work of theologian William Herzog who wrote a book back in the early 90's entitled *Parables as Subversive Speech*. Herzog brings a new lens to this, and other parables, examining things like land ownership, the working conditions of the peasants, the rights of people, how wealth is distributed and so on. And he sees the parables not as stories where the centre character is automatically seen as a figure representing God, but as stories about the very real issues that Jesus was drawing attention to in the time in which he lived. Herzog would have us learn to ask questions, inquire where we might not have done before. And certainly, through this lens, you might look at that opening a little differently.

*There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.*

Well, now that doesn't sound very much like the kingdom of heaven, does it. The landowner has the land, fences it in, builds a watch tower for I am supposing the idea of keeping out thieves or marauders. And then he leaves everything behind and goes off somewhere else. Supposedly to do the same somewhere else. There is no relationship with his tenants. Like his slaves, they are just there to do his bidding. Where is the relational aspect of agriculture that would more reflect the sharing economy that was the heart of Jesus' teaching.

Instead it feels remarkably like a multinational arriving in a foreign country, setting things up, legally protecting their investment and a security system that says keep out, then leaves to go somewhere else where he can exploit the workers. And when the workers revolt, killing his slaves, he simply sends more of them, as though they are expedient and all he wants is his profits. The fact that he sends his son, is further evidence that he has no connection with the actual vineyard, the tenants, his slaves, his son, his focus is always on the profits.

Hmmmmmm.

The owner cares not for others. The owner only care for himself and his profits. Is that the God we love?

But here it is on this particular weekend in the year of the worldwide pandemic, 2020, in our rural, small town situation, where we have just closed our churches for the foreseeable future, there is something else to note.

Listen again, to the last part of the parable as it fits into the situation in which Jesus is actually living out his last days on earth.....

*So, the tenants seized the son, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.*

And Jesus turns to the chief priests and asks the question: *Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"*

They said to him, “*He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.*”

The chief priests thinking themselves very clever, and thinking that God is like them, and thinking that they in the same situation would absolutely punish the tenants – thinking – an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a death for a death – this is their way of thinking, this is the world in which they live

*Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:*

*‘The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;[a]  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes’?*

*Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.[b]*

The kingdom of God belongs to the merciful. The kingdom of God belongs to those who try always to see through a different lens, to imagine a different understanding, to those who in humility may imagine that they do not have all the answers, and who, will place themselves under divine authority, and follow in the way of compassion.

Last week, during our discussion at Primrose, Jeff asked the question, aren’t we supposed to be following Jesus? What does it matter what others say? And by this he was referring to earlier old testament scriptures. These scriptures certainly have their place in our history, and they have deep instruction for us. But ultimately, we are trying to listen to the newer interpretations that Jesus is offering up, and that we, all these many years later, can find within our own context.

We are a servant people. And we serve one another. Not profit. Not landlords. Not multi nationals. Not political parties. We serve the goodness that can be found in ourselves and in others.

***Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You, Writer: Richard Gillard, Artists: Bruce Ley, Candice Bist***

## **Announcements**

With the rising numbers of covid cases here in Ontario, and the provincial governments repeated requests that we simply stay home as much as possible and resist going out and visiting, both Primrose and Trinity United Churches to keep their sanctuaries closed for public worship for the time being.

The work of the church continues in many ways, but not in the form of physical gathering on Sunday mornings. Each week a new podcast will be released along with articles and links to read for the week. We will be pondering in the weeks ahead how best to care for everyone during this uncertain time. Please contact me through our website – [ShelburnePrimrose.com](http://ShelburnePrimrose.com) if you have specific needs or requests.

Our closing prayer comes from the moderator of the United Church of Canada in a special service he offered during this difficult time. But I know that many of you are missing the Lord's prayer, so I am going to add that to his prayer, so you can join me in that from home.

In this time of COVID-19, we pray:  
 When we aren't sure, God,  
 help us be calm;  
 when information comes  
 from all sides, correct and not,  
 help us to discern;  
 when fear makes it hard to breathe,  
 and anxiety seems to be the order of the day,  
 slow us down, God;  
 help us to reach out with our hearts,  
 when we can't touch with our hands;  
 help us to be socially connected,  
 when we have to be socially distant;  
 help us to love as perfectly as we can,  
 knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."  
 For the doctors, we pray,  
 for the nurses, we pray,  
 for the technicians and the janitors and the  
 aides and the caregivers, we pray,  
 for the researchers and theorists,  
 the epidemiologists and investigators,  
 for those who are sick,  
 and those who are grieving, we pray,  
 for all who are affected,  
 all around the world...  
 we pray  
 for safety,  
 for health,  
 for wholeness.  
 May we feed the hungry,  
 give drink to the thirsty,  
 clothe the naked and house those without homes;  
 may we walk with those who feel they are alone,  
 and may we do all that we can to heal  
 the sick—

in spite of the epidemic,  
in spite of the fear.  
Help us, O God,  
that we might help each other.  
In the love of the Creator,  
in the name of the Healer,  
in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,  
we pray.  
May it be so.

***Come Thou Font of Every Blessing, Instrumental, Music: American Folk Tune, Arranger:  
Bruce Ley***