

Trinity United Church
Beamsville



Sunday, October 10th, 2021
Creation Time 5

Thanksgiving Sunday
Celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism

Creation Speaks...
and we can move from worry to witness

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*"Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."
("When I Am Among the Trees" by Mary Oliver)*



Gathering Music

Andrew Poaps, Music Director

Welcome

Rev. Heather Weaver-Orosz

Good morning, welcome, and a very Happy Thanksgiving to you and all in your circle of care. Perhaps, like us, you've been able to welcome home some folks you haven't seen for a while. Perhaps, like many, you are waiting patiently for life and travel to shift to allow those reunions to happen again. Perhaps, like countless more, you are missing loved ones, no longer with you as mortality takes its hard toll. Wherever you are, wherever your heart resides this day and season, may you know that you have a home and a family, here in this church family. We are thankful for you, and for this chance to be together, in every way that we can.

Across this morning, you're going to hear me, at least a couple of times, quoting my colleague Beverly Brazier. She has many wise and faithful things to say, especially about Christian disciples, living into and out of a place of gratitude. She says, for example, that "to live in gratitude, to give thanks, to say this world is a good gift from a good God, is to join our own fragile, beating hearts to the heart of the universe, tilting the world just a little bit more toward what it's created to be." (Beverly Brazier)

May this be something of what we know and answer in our time today. May we hear God's call, and receive God's grace, giving us all that we need to live faithfully, for this moment and long after.

Let us prepare our hearts and our minds for worship...

Lighting the Christ Candle

Call to Worship (Beverly Brazier)

To worship is the most radical action we can take.

To gather with a company of others to say thank you is not a light thing to do.

It demands from us a frank admission that we are not God,

that the sense we have that there is more to life than we know,
sometimes vague, other times so strong, takes our breath away.

The feelings of thanks that rise up unbidden,

at the colours of a sunset or aurora,

at the sound of our own name spoken by someone we love,

that feeling of gratitude... is in fact the Spirit within us.

There is someone to thank.

And we come to say thank you to the Holy One, the Creator, the Giver of Life.

Opening Hymn

"We Plough the Fields" (Voices United 520)

Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory

Rosemary Addison

Opening Prayer

For all that is...

we bless you, God!

For joy fulfilled...

we bless you, God!

For sorrow survived...

we bless you, God!

For grain from the earth,

for rain from the sky,

for our nights and our days...

we bless you, God!

With words that say, "Thank you!"

With songs that shout, "Amen!"

With our prayer and our worship...

we bless you, God!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen!

With thanksgiving for this time to pray together, let's lift up the prayer that Jesus' heart gave to ours, in this paraphrase of The Prayer of Jesus, by Jim Cotter.
Let us pray:

The Prayer of Jesus (a paraphrase by Jim Cotter, Voices United 916)
Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker,
Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and all that shall be.
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever.
Amen.

Sung Response "Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New"
 (More Voices 115)

Growing Together 'Can you hear the trees talking?'

Good morning my friends – and Happy Thanksgiving to you!
Today I've brought in a little something that currently lives in our garage. Most of our "entertaining" these days happens in the garage, so we've tried to make it a little prettier out there. This not-so-little piece of art is one of those pretty pieces, that I like very, very much. Can you see what it says around the sketches...

"Thank you God for sun and showers.
Thank you for each lovely flower.
Thank you for each stately tree.
Through all of these you speak to me."

So I'm wondering, have you ever heard a flower speak? What about a tree? Or the sun, or rain showers? No? Me either... well, not really. But then what on earth does this artist mean when they talk of God speaking to us in parts of nature?

Do you think it means that God's beauty is all around us, and that we can feel and know more about God if we really stop and take in all that God provides for us in things like rain and sun, flowers and trees? That's what I think, for sure. I think that God surrounds us with incredible things that teach us about God's Love in ways that words never could. That feels like a very important reason for us to do everything we can to work with God to protect nature, to love Creation. We are precious to God, and so is every part of Creation.

What we're about to do next is another way of saying, with more than words, that we know each and every one of us is precious to God. What we're about to watch is first a few photos and then a video, taken last Sunday afternoon, to celebrate the Baptism of a little one named Ellis. We're going to watch this together, and then we'll have a chance to say, all together, how precious she is to God, to her family, and to all of us.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Ellis Susanne Brady,
daughter of Emma & Eric Brady, baptized on Sunday, October 3rd, 2021.

Introduction & Photo Memories

And now, as we prepare to witness and celebrate this sacrament, let us remember the words of the Iona Community, who proclaim that:

*"With the whole church
We affirm that we are made in God's image,
Befriended by Christ,
Empowered by the Spirit.
With people everywhere
We affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity,
Planted more deeply than all that is wrong.
With all creation
We celebrate the miracle and wonder of life;
The unfolding purposes of God,
Forever at work in ourselves and the world."
(The Iona Community, Daily Act of Prayer)*

[Following this introduction, we will show the video captured on Sunday, October 3rd, 2021, in the backyard of Ken & Heather Brady, paternal grandparents of Ellis. At the conclusion of the video, the congregation gathered in the sanctuary or at home will be invited to share together the Congregational Commitment, Declaration and Welcome, An Affirmation of Faith, and Sung Blessing.]

Commitment of the Congregation

As a baptized and baptizing people, God calls us
to receive this child in Christ's name, as we ourselves have been received.
We all belong to one household of faith in Jesus Christ.
Do you, the community of Trinity United Church,
who witness and celebrate this sacrament,
promise your love, support, example, and care for Ellis,
as she lives and grows in Christ?

We do, by the grace of God.

As a community of faith, will you support this family
with Christian teaching and faithful prayer?

We will, God being our helper.

Declaration and Welcome

One: Into the household of faith,
we welcome you with joy and thanksgiving.

ALL: We are members of the Body of Christ.

We are inheritors of God's promise.

In the name of Christ, we welcome you.

Affirmation of Faith: A New Creed

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

**who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,

**to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.
We are not alone. Thanks be to God! Amen.**

Sung Blessing "See the Children Here Before Us" (Voices Together 509)

Scripture Joel 2: 21-27 (The Inclusive Bible) George Stephenson
21 Forget your fear, my beloved land! Rejoice and be glad, for YHWH has done great things. 22 Forget your fear, you beasts in the field! The wilderness pastures will once again be carpeted in green, trees will bear fruit again, and the fig and the vine will give you their full yield. 23 Rejoice, Children of Zion! Rejoice! Be glad in YHWH your God, who send you rain-the autumn and spring rains of old-and a new spring crop. 24 The threshing floors will be heaped with grain, the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. 25 I will repay you for the years that were eaten away by the locust swarm, the winged locust, the scavenger locust, and the bark-stripping locust-my great army which I sent against you. 26 You will eat your fill and be satisfied, and praise the name of YHWH your God, who has dealt wondrously with you! 27 You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, YHWH, am your God, and there is no other. My people will never again be put to shame!

Message "Creation Speaks: Eco Divina & The Splendour
of God's Creation"

The Season of Creation is usually five weeks long, sometimes six, but for me it always seems to go by in a heartbeat. I'm sure that's because I like it so much and would like for it to stay as it is, a little bit longer. I feel the same way every time I stand in a forest or any place where it feels like an immersion in nature. With or without water, the language and experience of immersion is beautifully similar to some of what we might experience in witnessing a baptism. There is that profound, sacred sense of all that is right and good washing over us, cleansing and renewing, reminding us of who God is, and who we are to God: beloved, cherished beyond value, and held in the palm of the divine, unconditionally.

That sense of being held by the divine is a significant part of a practice, an understanding, called Eco Divina. Similar to what you might have come across in lectio divina (reading to experience God's presence) or visio divina (seeing to

experience God's presence), eco divina is an ancient practice of praying with nature; of opening all our senses in the splendour of God's exquisite Creation, to feel and know God more deeply. In that space, whenever we have that beautiful invitation, may we hear and know God's call on our lives, for the sake of all life.

Let us pray...

Baptism Sunday, especially a Baptism Sunday that falls on Thanksgiving Sunday, is a beautiful opportunity for me to opt out of a sermon. I could easily, validly, say to you that what you have just witnessed and affirmed is a profound and living message of God's generous and life-changing grace... and what more could mere words add to that Love?

How about, instead, I bring you some ideas – complementary ideas, that might come alongside and lift up what God is always and forever up to... especially so on a Baptism Sunday that falls on Thanksgiving Sunday.

First, a story of a forest. Planted in 2014, there is a forest outside Oslo, known simply as 'The Future Library of Norway'. Conceived and designed by Katie Paterson, it is a forest of 1000 trees, planted in 2014, grown specifically and protected until 2114, at which time they will be harvested for paper, set aside to publish 100 manuscripts, collected across the 100 years of waiting. The collected books – from authors such as Margaret Atwood, the first contributor – will remain held in trust, unseen and unpublished, until the project comes to fruition.

As with all things in life, the Future Library has met with varied opinion. Some herald it as secretive and elitist, hiding texts away from multiple generations. Others, including myself, see and hear it as a profound act of hope. It is a living, breathing expression of hope that drops anchor in a time beyond our present knowing, and pulls us forward in trust that there will be books with ideas, and readers to take them in, and a longing to learn from where we are now. The Future Library of Norway is living the call of Mary Jo Leddy, theologian and social activist, who reminds us that, "in the face of overwhelming injustice we must declare, "We beg to differ." To plan for the future is to proclaim gratitude for the present. It is an act of thankful expression – for who we are, for whose we are, and who and what we long future generations to know, too. It is prophetic, brave, and faithful.

In this morning's text from Joel chapter 2, we hear that same deep longing, that same deep and passionate looking ahead, from a prophet of a time long ago, equally beyond our present knowing. We gather together bits and pieces of who Joel was, who he trusted himself to be, at God's invitation among the people. We come alongside Joel's voice, his courage and his will, to lift a way of being back into the sightlines of folks who have been living in worry for a long, long time. "Forget your fear", he cries boldly. "Rejoice and be glad, for YHWH has done great things." The years have been hard, there's no denying. Locusts swarming,

destroying, stripping bark; crops destroyed, alongside hope. The years have been hard... but the present moment will not have the last word, Joel proclaims. God continues to be wondrous. God continues to do wondrous things. We are not left in shame and misery. We are accompanied and held, emboldened and enlightened by the God of the universe, who alone can restore our vision of what can be. God's Creation stands at the ready, to grow and provide. God's people now have a choice, to rise and live in harmony with Creation... for the sake of this present, and for all future generations. Joel doesn't speak of future books but of future being – and therein we find the same prophetic, brave, and faithful choices.

When it comes to prophetic, brave, and faithful choices in this time and place, I don't know what it would take to plant and prepare a future library of Lincoln. I love the idea, but I suspect it's not that easy to replicate. The same could be said of another idea, to plan for the future. It won't be easy, but then not much worth having comes without investment, on every level.

This other idea, this other dream, is called "2030 Climate Sanctuaries". You can read about it in Clint Schnekloth's latest blog, by the same title, where he describes the vision of churches everywhere, but especially in climate destroying places like North America and Europe, to pledge carbon neutrality by 2030. It's a huge commitment, some will say; far bigger and far harder than planting and protecting 1000 trees for 100 books. Quick math says 2030 is barely 9 years away. But, as Clint Schnekloth says quite plainly, "I am increasingly convinced the greatest failure of the church in my generation is its complete silence and inaction on the climate crisis." He goes on to confess his place in the silence and inaction; to accept that among his many pursuits for social justice and healing, when it comes to the climate crisis, his own work, "and the wider work of the church, is tepid at best, negligent in many ways, and really even complicit. He says, "Christianity is complicit perhaps especially because we have so emphasized God's special relationship with humanity and so have disregarded and othered creation. The result is the Anthropocene. And theology and church practice overly focused on personal salvation and meeting individual needs of privileged spiritual consumers.... The neighbour who needs us now is the planet. It will require the whole church on the planet, existing not for itself but for God's whole creation, to lessen or mitigate the worst of what is already coming."

(<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/clintschnekloth/2021/10/2030-climate-sanctuaries/>)

The prophetic call of Joel was and is a call from worry to witness. It is echoed in the cries of Creation: in animals and trees, in two-legged and four, in the magnificent winged ones and minute crawling ones; in human, animal, and species beyond our counting. This is our moment – a sacred, precious, all-too-fleeting moment, in which we can hear again God's freely given promise of what can still be. We can hear the promise and then respond with prophetic, brave,

faithful, grateful choices. We can accept God's grace that comes with an invitation, to witness to a way of being, in Jesus' Way of being, with plans to share this life's blessings with generations long after our own. It is a choice you are making even in being here, today, in this way. For in the words of Bev Brazier: "To gather like this, to be a community like this, is either a fool's dream or a declaration of outrageous hope. I choose the latter. Violence and death will not have the last word. There is a way forward and there is hope. [This is] an act of moral imagination and outrageous hope, guided by love that is bigger than we are, more powerful than we have yet to absorb; [calling us to] put away the power of apathy and despair, to enter this space... as an act of defiance in the face of everything that denies life and love." (Gathering, Pentecost 2 2017, p. 41)

For this, and countless reasons more, we say with all we are, thanks be to God!

Prayer

God of life and love, we know what we're up against... in a world of suffering, the trampling of Creation, disproportionate wealth, disease, heartache. We know that some have said there's nothing to be done. "We beg to differ." We choose this declaration of outrageous hope.

We choose to say thank you – for this glorious creation, this blessed community, this life and work before us. In the midst of suffering and abuse, and acts of violence we do not understand, we call on our simplest words, praying for peace and humility. In the midst of aching bodies, hearts, and minds, we choose to believe in the promise of healing, in all the many ways that can come to be. For ourselves, for all your people; for nations that long for sharing; for children and their parents who long for wholeness and enough resources to be strong, we choose this act of moral imagination, guided by You and your love, giving us all that we need to put away the power of apathy and despair, claiming instead your vision for this community; for all Creation. We choose You, God – our greatest blessing. In the Way of Jesus, we follow, we seek, and we pray. Amen.

Hymn "Touch the Earth Lightly" (Voices United 307)

The Life & Work of Our Church Community

Offering Invitation

And now, remembering that every good and perfect gift flows from the love of God, we celebrate the invitation and opportunity to share from our gifts, with God's people everywhere.

Song of Thanksgiving "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" (VU 541)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.**

Prayer

Generous God, with thanksgiving, we offer these gifts to you.
We give with our hearts, in response to your Love,
accepting your trust to be part of your realm.
Bless them and use them, for your purposes, in your ways.
We give and we pray in the name and the Way of Jesus. Amen.

Anthem

"Sing to the Lord of Harvest" (arr. Healey Willan)

Joyce Brown, Jane Pritchard, Norma Weller

Prayers for Ourselves & Others

God of all great gifts,
hear our thanksgiving prayer!
Thank you for this beautiful world spinning its way through space,
the earth, our home, magnificent beyond understanding.
Thank you for the golden sun beaming out energy,
and for moonlight and starlight gracing the night.
Thank you for the cycle of seasons and most particularly for autumn:
streams of golden grain flowing from combines,
fresh green and red apples mounded on market shelves,
pumpkins lined up at roadside stands.
We give thanks for farmers,
and for domestic and foreign workers whose physical labour
gives us food for life.
Thank you, too, for all who transport and sell what we eat,
bringing groceries to our tables from around the globe.
And yet there are hungry and homeless people in this land of plenty:
hear our prayer for those in need around us,
Thank you for all who reached out this year to help their neighbour.
Thank you that even in the midst of a pandemic,
people are pulling together to provide support to the grieving
and practical help for those who are sick.
Thank you that the church flourishes under pressure,
and even has found creative ways to worship together safely.
Thank you also for health care teams who don't give up,
working tirelessly in heroic ways to save lives.

Thank you for the gift of a COVID-19 vaccine,
and the way it is flattening the curve of this pandemic.
Many countries cannot afford the vaccine;
open the hearts of rich countries like ours to share.
Give wisdom to our politicians as they make policy decisions
that have life and death consequences,
particularly as they negotiate land claims with Indigenous communities
on whose traditional lands we all live.
Give strength to those who are suffering,
healing to those coping with sickness,
courage to those overwhelmed with fear,
comfort to those who grieve,
peace to those unsure of what's next,
hope to those feeling lost or alone.
Thank you that no matter how far apart we may feel from another,
Jesus walks with us, always and especially closely in times like these.
Amen.

Closing Hymn "God of Life" (Voices United 528)

Blessing & Sending Forth

"To come to say thank you is subversive; it is a radical act in a world that at times appears meaningless and devoid of hope. It is an act of defiance in the face of so many forces that deny and destroy life and teach us that there is nothing we can do. It is an act of humility in a world that says, "You've worked for what you have, you are entitled, you deserve all this." It is an act of community in a world that encourages you to say, "I don't need anyone." Don't ever be fooled into thinking that what we do today is simple or ineffective. We are changing the world. To live in gratitude, to give thanks, to say this world is a good gift from a good God is to join our own fragile, beating hearts to the heart of the universe, tilting the world just a little bit more toward what it's created to be." (Bev Brazier)

Go now, in the name of God,
with thanks to God,
with the blessing of God,
and tilt the world.

Sung Blessing "Go, My Friends, In Peace" (Voices Together 839)

Words: Joyce Elaine Eilers (USA)

Text adapted by: Mennonite Worship and Song Committee, 2019

**Go, my friends in peace, and know that the love of God will guide you
Feel the Spirit here beside you showing you the way.
In your time of trouble when hurt and despair are there to grieve you,
Know that your God will never leave you.
God will bring you courage.
Know that the Christ who came to us to die that you might live
Will never leave you lost and alone in his beloved world.
Go, my friends, in peace
Go, my friends, in peace.**

Postlude



Used with permission & gratitude:

Call to Worship & Blessing and Sending Forth – by Beverly Brazier,
Gathering, Pentecost 1 2017; p. 53.

Opening Prayer – by Richard Bott (The Rt. Rev. Dr.), when at Dunbar Heights
UC, Vancouver BC; Gathering, Pentecost 2, 2017, p. 43.

Prayers for Ourselves & Others – adapted from work by Carol Penner as
published at <https://leadinginworship.com/2021/10/thanksgiving-in-times-like-these/>