

SERMON AND SERVICE

June 2 2019

INTRODUCTION to the Bulletin and service for Regional Council Annual Meeting 2019

The introit- could easily be whichever Introit your congregation is used to using, that will be your choice.

The Call to Worship is simply one that can be read responsively; feel free to change up words to suit you. **The Prayer of Approach** is the same, though read in unison.

The Centering Prayer:

If you are uncertain about the Centering prayer that is included in the service, either eliminate it or follow these fairly simple instructions: Invite people to remain seated and just relax themselves. We normally start off by singing the words to # 400 VU and we end the prayer with the same words. Throughout the prayer have the pianist or organist play either the tune to # 400 over and over as light background music, or some other gentle soft music played in the background. The invitation to close their eyes in Prayer is to simply help them concentrate on the words they hear without any visual distraction. **The breathing in deeply** and letting your breath out slowly helps us settle ourselves into a relaxed state allowing us to feel that tension leaving our bodies as we rest. Letting the things that bother us or gnaw away at our wellbeing, empties our minds so that we can actually feel the presence of the Spirit with us. **The time of Silence** should be offered for a full minute if possible, as that allows each person enough time to be open to what they personally are looking for in their life. The time after the silence is a time to affirm the Spirit's presence and the assurance that God is with all of us at this time and we end with the same words from # 400 VU Lord listen to your children praying

The Bible readings are from the Lectionary for this Sunday.

The Sermon is self-explanatory and can be easily changed or adapted if you wish to do that.

The Prayers of the People need to be your own, so feel free to fill in names, concerns for people who may be ill in mind, body or relationship, folks who may be in care facilities, hospitals, recovering or dying at home. Prayers for our Church and faiths around the world are appropriate as well.

So in all of what has been provided for you, enjoy yourselves! Use this as a chance to talk with and be with one another in a Worship service you may not be familiar with, but hopefully one that gives your Spiritual leadership a break and for you who use it, to know that you have a format and the skills to be a leader in your fellowship on this Sunday. Peace and Love to all!

Jim

INTROIT: # 374 VU Come and Find the Quiet Centre-verse #1

Lighting the Christ Candle: Just as a spark of light can illuminate for us an idea of huge proportions, let the light of this candle be a reminder of all that is and all that can be for this community of faith.

“ Light the Christ Candle”

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsively)

Nothing is static in this world- even the rocks of the earth can move and melt. Neither is our faith or our vision static, as Christ calls us out into the world.

But that can be a scary place to go! We may be very happy just where we are! After all we have spent a lifetime arriving at the places we are in our present lives.

We have this profound faith in the teachings of Jesus, teachings that ask us to put ourselves out for others, to stretch our imaginations and to really look at

what we need, what the world needs, to become a healed and healing place.

And so on this day, we open ourselves to the work of the Spirit of Christ that dwells within and among us at all times. On this morning we stand proudly to look at a life lived with Jesus and not just a life lived in Jesus. Come people of God, let us worship together!

HYMN: # 1 MV Let us Build a House /or 331 VU The Church's One Foundation

PRAYER OF APPROACH (in unison)

Holy, Loving presence , who we name as God in our lives, we come to this place of Worship on this day knowing that our lives are constantly changing and that through the inspiration of the teachings of Jesus, we are changed into even better people than we were before. It would seem O God, that we can take nothing for granted in this new world in which we live - boundaries change and shift, and yet there is a pattern in our lives that has stood the test of time and that pattern is that Your essence, Your presence, has never left your people. On this day, as we sing, pray and study the Word, we gain courage, wisdom and faith and for those things we are truly thankful. Amen

CHILDREN'S TIME:

We need to use our imagination this morning! Could we pretend that we are in jail with Paul and Silas, chained to the benches we are sitting on, but instead of being sad and hurt and worrying about being in jail, we are going to sing songs that are happy and joyful because we are safe in God's hands. **Let's sing the first verse of He's got the whole world in his hands.** (SING and be HAPPY!!!) When all of a sudden there is an earthquake, the building trembles, our chains fall off, and the jail falls to pieces and we are free. What a glorious feeling to be free and out of jail!! But the strangest thing happens because instead of running out the door and leaving this town, Paul and Silas and you and I stay because the jailer

is in trouble and we give up our freedom to help him... That's one of the really hard things about being a follower of Jesus, to give up some of our freedoms in order to help other people. Paul and Silas do this because they love all people of God, jailers included and that's the same thing that each of us need to be able to do - love one another!

PASSING The PEACE: Let us take the time to welcome one another by sharing the peace of Christ.

Hymn: # 79 MV Spirit, open my heart /or 626 VU I heard the Voice of Jesus

Centering Prayer: # 400 VU

CENTERING PRAYER AND PERSONAL REFLECTION:

As we come to this time of centering prayer and personal reflection, you are invited to remain seated, could we sing together the words from Lord Listen to Your Children praying #400 in Voices United.

Prayer: There are places and times in our lives where we can come to find that sense of the Spirit which we are looking for - for some it may be by a river; for some in the quiet of a room; for some in a church setting like this; and for others that special place they have- but whatever or wherever that place is - it is a place of spiritual safety, a place where we feel that comfort we seek, that we can let go of all our concerns and simply come to God. This morning, we have gathered in this place to be sanctuary together. Come to this place where we seek spiritual safety and comfort and open your heart and soul and mind to your understanding of God. I would invite you to begin this process by closing your eyes in contemplation and to then begin breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly; relax all of your muscles in ways that work for you; let the tension go in your neck and shoulders and then feel that warm tired sleepy feeling run down you're your back, to your thighs, into your legs and right out to

your feet and toes, until you are totally relaxed. Now just rest in that feeling for a moment. **REST** In order to find that inner spiritual connection with our understanding of God, bring that same relaxed, warm, tired feeling into your mind and let your mind, your inner spirit drift in relaxation, yet as soon as we do this somewhere, deep down in our subconscious minds, there are things that have been bothering us, irritants, big problems, little problems, some things that we have no control over and other things we can do something about - whatever they are, deliberately bring them to the surface of your mind, acknowledge them and then just as deliberately and quickly, simply hand them over to God, let them go and for the moment they are gone - don't try to pick them up again, just let them go. As each of those things leave you, that tired, lethargic feeling begins to leave your inner spiritual self and in its place is this euphoric feeling of liberation - your spirit rises to meet the Spirit of God. In the time of silence that is offered to you now, let the music played for you lead you gently along, let yourself fly and respond to where and what God is offering you and be at peace within yourself - **SILENCE** – The Spirit of God can be like the air around you and we are like a young bird tentatively slipping off a high place, the terror of being able to fly is replaced by the total euphoria of flight - the sharp, cool morning air buoys us up and a shivering thrill runs through our entire bodies - we are flying, we are free, we have been loosed from the bondage of the human condition - we are one with our God - with God there is nothing we cannot do - open your hearts O faithful people, open your hearts and feel Gods Word... God has never left us alone in this human journey and yet like small children we look over our shoulders for the reassurance that our understanding of God is still there. So on we simply invite the Spirit's presence to remain with us always as we once again sing the words to Lord Listen to your children praying...

SCRIPTURE:

1 st New Testament Reading: Acts 16: 16-34

Responsive Reading: Psalm 97; page 817 VU

2nd New Testament Reading: Revelations 22:12-14,16-17,20-21

♪ **Hymn : # 138 MV My Love Colours Outside The Lines / or 606 VU In Christ there is no East or West**

Gospel Reading: John 17: 20-26

L: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church through these words today.

All: Thanks Be to God!

SERMON: Challenge, Change and Unity.

(A fictional story based on some of my understanding of what I see in the reading from Acts 16)

“The early gray dawn brings a chill with it and just before the sun rises there is that little dip in the temperature - the young girl, barely more than a teenager, drew her flimsy garment closer to her body and hoping for a day that would bring her some decent food and some joy, she washed her face in the cold water and combed out her hair before she put it up and then looked around her very plain surroundings - there were no frills, no dressers, just this small room, a sleeping mat, a jug of cold water, an old comb and a cloth to dry her face with. She was a slave and had been born a slave and knew nothing else but this. O she remembered her mother, but that was some years ago and the memory of safety and comfort has long disappeared as she was so young when she was taken from her mother. But now she was been owned by two men, who used her ability to tell the future, as a means for them to make money - things could have been worse, she received enough to eat, she could have been sold into prostitution or as a labourer in the field.”(JBMacNaughton)

While those words are fictional, it helps me and I hope you get into the story about what it may have been like for this young teenage girl as she faces another day as a slave to two prominent businessmen. The reading from Acts tells us that she brought her owners in a great deal of money.

She is the product that they were selling in order to be successful business persons in their day and in their society. They were not necessarily evil but in their intent to use this young teenager as they have done, they create evil and it destroys the very fabric of the unconditional love that Jesus calls all humanity to. It takes a lot of sacrifice to go against what other people consider "good business" practices. And of course those business men are upset and very quickly the justice system of that day, that obviously favoured those in power and in authority, found Paul and Silas guilty of destroying the business enterprise of these two men, and so Paul and Silas are flogged and thrown into prison. But despite their treatment, even Paul and Silas hold to a higher ground, as they had the opportunity to flee from the jail, and let the jailer kill himself for losing his prisoners, but chose instead to stay and witness to the jailor as he finds Christ and completely changes his life. That's a combination of compassion, of unconditional love and about the unity of a relationship with God. (*PROP: have a short piece of old rusty chain (if you want)*)

When you start to think of (these) chains as placing people in bondage, I find that it is not only the young slave girl that is held in bondage by her owners but that it is the society of their day, the position of economic advantage and the power of money, that hold the owners in bondage. Even in today's society right here in the communities in which we live, there are folks who would love to be able to reach out and help others, but the constraints of private ownership, of a successful business being run under the rules of economics and not a moral Christian code, binds our hands so that what should be a simple thing to resolve becomes very cumbersome and complicated.

Now whether we believe that Paul is just ticked off by this young slave girl's constant agitation, that he and Silas are slaves too of the God most high, and that in a tiff he calls on the evil Spirit within her to come out, or whether we would rather believe that Paul, seeing this young girl being used by others and enslaved as she was, takes pity on her and cures her in the name of Jesus Christ, that probably doesn't make a great

difference, but what is important in a social justice context, is that the woman is freed from her affliction and that her owners now have a defective product that they can no longer sell for great profits - as businessmen they have been ruined - and in anger they take Paul and Silas before the magistrates who find them guilty of the crime of ruining the men's business and suddenly we see that all of society is then held in bondage by these economic chains (*consider throwing the piece of chain on the floor*) that hold precedence over any kind of moral Christian law..

So, as you think of your life as business people, as professionals, as farmers or ranchers or labourers, even though many of you are retired, where do you find your emotions to be when you hear the story framed in this way? Do you find yourself challenged to say that there has to be a little bit of both of these two different sets of values? Or is that simply because we do **NOT** want to let go of the wealth we have accumulated or the standard of living we have set? Look at it in another way that is even closer to home- gasoline is now \$ 1.29.9 per litre (in April 2019) in our community in Saskatchewan, where we have some of the higher standards of living. The average individual Canadians income was projected for January 2018 at \$55,806.00 per year, yet in Vietnam, gasoline is \$ 1.18 per litre with the average income for professional middle class workers is \$13,200.00 per year - obviously despite all our complaining, our gasoline is still for us, relatively cheap - and yet that gasoline price holds us in bondage because we used to get it so cheaply and now we would like it to go back to 50 or 60 cents per litre.

But back to Paul and Silas, who are now in the most inner cell of the local prison, in stocks and bound in physical chains but instead of being there cowering in the dark, feeling sorry for themselves, they are singing lustily hymns of praise and are praying to God. It states in the reading from Acts that the others prisoners were listening - what were they listening to? They are listening to the stories of how loving this God is and on the teachings of this man called Jesus and the stories of the unconditional love that God has for Christ and that Christ has for God and

that both of them have for all people, that will someday make up this Gospel, and they would have been known to Paul and Silas because these are some of the very basics of the teachings of Jesus. This is witnessing at its best because it is happening where the people are oppressed and in prison. It isn't much of a jump of logic to assume that at least some of these folks in prison are in there for so called crimes that were no less frivolous than those that Paul and Silas have been accused of and even others for simply not being able to pay their debts, something which Jesus addressed in the original version of what we call the Lord's prayer - **"forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"**. When an earthquake breaks down the walls of the jail and removes the stocks and the chains from the prisoners, we can read into that story that this is a miracle caused by God, or some sort of divine intervention, or simply an earthquake in a part of the world where that would naturally happen - but the earthquake is not what is important - what is important is that Paul and Silas have the opportunity to walk out the door as freemen, to escape and allow the jailer to take his own life as he has lost the prisoners he was to safeguard. Most prisoners would have run, but Paul and Silas are bound to the law of God as given them through Jesus, that there are things that are more important than one's self and so they stay to be the servant people to a jailer who in turn is given an opportunity and then an understanding of God in his life. Again this is witnessing to those who desperately needed it - the chains of self-importance that can so easily bind us to ourselves and our own often greedy needs are again thrown aside.

In our reading from Revelation, verses 16 and 17 we find these words - **"It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The Spirit and the bride say COME and let everyone who hears say, COME, and let everyone who is thirsty COME, Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift"**

Each one of us is called to a ministry of freeing the oppressed by our actions, by our Christian values and by sharing the unconditional love of

God. We throw aside the chains of convention that bind us to the world and take on the invisible bonds that bind us to our personal understanding of God through our Christ and in doing that we become, as people of the world, the healed and healing people of God.

On this Sunday as we gather together in worship at the first Annual meeting of the Living Skies Regional Council of the United Church of Canada, that covers the whole Province of Saskatchewan, we are facing something totally new and different from the past experiences we have had as a Conference made up of many Presbyteries. And yet at the same time, there is also something very familiar because not only are many of us the same people, we are held together by that same message from our Gospel Reading that we are to be united together by our being unconditionally loved by both the Spirit of God and of Christ and our unconditional love for that Spirit and for one another. We gather together under that banner of love, despite our many differences of character, theology and practice knowing we have far more in common than the differences that could keep us apart. We are The United Church of Canada, we are Christians and we are a people who know that we must work hard to make our world, our personal and corporate lives better than they have ever been before. May each of us in our living, in our loving and in our being the whole people of God, know that we are both a Blessing and Blessed. Amen

CHOIR ANTHEM

MINUTE FOR MISSION

THE OFFERING

The Offertory Hymn... # 191 MV- What Can I do

Prayer of Dedication (in unison)

Our offering this day of our money, our talents and life style, are all tools that we use to enrich our personal lives and the lives

of this community of faith and this community in which we live. We simply seek the best for all people and trust that our gifts are acceptable to our understanding of God with us. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

As we come to this time of Prayers of the People, you are invited to take part vocally or silently, in whichever way you are most comfortable.

We come on this day searching for the presence of all that is Holy in our lives, each with our own concerns, our joys, our lives - we open ourselves to the Spirit to direct and guide us, to prod us into action and to be gracious to one another. Be patient with us O God, as we stumble along in our own fashion.

We pray for the Spirits presence with us on this planet and for the blessing and insight to help us preserve and then conserve what has been entrusted to. This fragile spinning blue planet is what sustains our physical lives- grant us wisdom, grant us a sense of appreciation, grant us life.

We pray for the Spirits presence as we, live with one another - we are so different, our personalities which differ cause us problems and yet when we put our minds to it along with our Christian guidelines we can do so much good for one another- we are different in gender, gender identity, orientation, race, and age and yet we breath the same air, drink the same water, live in the same space- help us sort out what are to be priorities in our physical lives and then grant us the faith and courage to carry those things out that are acceptable to all people.

We seek the Spirits presence among the faiths of the world- you are the God of all people who calls us to reconciliation and unconditional love- empower the faiths of the world to find that place in their lives- we hold up this Christian faith as the path we have chosen to follow- it is in our Christ, where His teachings have led us, that we have found abundant life - we hold up this United Church of Canada as the denomination that we have chosen to belong to for within that denomination we have found a

theology that speaks to us and to the health of the world and the Kingdom as we understand it.

On this day we hold up the fellowship of our home churches, where we have become a family in every sense of the word- we love, we laugh, we cry, we fight, we curse and we make up and we live together for the good of all and not just for ourselves or those whom we especially like- on this day we ask one another to hear our individual prayers.....

For those facing surgery; we pray and trust in the skills of surgeons and nursing staff- for all who reside in our care homes. The staff that so lovingly takes care of them and the families that continue to offer support and love through visitation; for those just marrying; for those who have experienced separation or ending of relationship- for the dying, for those who are recovering at home. And for those who have lost loved ones to death. For those who we may not know by name but whose suffering and pain is known to our God..

There is a cost to helping people find freedom in a relationship - that cost will be different for each one of us- we will have to let go of some things and sometimes our priorities will have to change, but in all things we have the presence of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of Jesus to guide us. And now we come together to say the prayer that we know so well in our hearts and minds ...**“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen”**

HYMN: # 209 MV Go, make a Difference / or 213 VU Rejoice the Lord is King

BENEDICTION

#974 “Strathdee Choral Amen”

♪ Organ Postlude.