

Osler Mennonite Church Worship Service

Peace Sunday – November 8, 2020

Terri Lynn Friesen: Worship Leader

Matt Pederberg: Music & Children's Time

Nora Pederberg: Sermon

Opening Welcome & Land Acknowledgement

Welcome OMC community to our worship service this morning. I hope that this service finds you safe and warm in your homes. This morning's service is being hosted at the Vine & Table, which is a community house located on Treaty 6 Territory and the tradition homeland of the Métis. "We acknowledge that we are all treaty people, original inhabitants and those who came later – inheritors of a diverse history, dwellers in a common land, travellers toward a better day. We joyfully claim the rights and responsibilities as treaty people."

(Shortened from: —Treaty People's Creed (2011), The All My Relations Network of Saskatchewan Conference)

Today we come together on peace Sunday. I invite you to light a candle as a reminder of the Spirits presence that unites us all as we come together this morning for worship. My name is Nora Pederberg, joining me in person to host this service are my housemates Matt Pederberg, and Terri Lynn Friesen who will now lead us in today's call to worship.

Call to Worship - Psalm 78:1-7

My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth!
I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden from of old –
the things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.

We won't hide them from our children;
we will tell the next generation.
We'll tell them of
your praiseworthy deeds, YHWH,
your power, and the wonders you have performed.

You set up statues for our forebears,
and established the Law of Israel,
which you commanded our Ancestors
to teach their children

so the next generation would know them –
children yet to be born –
and as they come up,
they would tell their own children.

Then they would put their trust in you
and not forget your deeds, but keep your commandments.

Prayer of Invocation

God of captives and pilgrims,
you brought your people home from despair
and gave them a land of freedom and plenty.
Look in mercy on us your servants,
deliver us from the prison of selfishness and sin,
and bring us home to justice, sharing, and compassion,
the realm you promised all the world
in Jesus Christ the Savior. Amen.

Children's Time

Jesus Love Me 🎵 & “The Boy, the mole, the fox, and the Horse” by Charlie Mackesy

Prayer of the People *(Adapted from Rev. Christine Sobania Johnson)*

Every day we journey on this earth is a day in which we make choices:
left or right, up or down, in or out, yes or no?
Some choices are simple, and some are very complex,
but one choice informs all the others:
Who will be our God?
Who will we trust to see us through this journey?
Who has been with us from before the beginning, bringing us into existence?
Who has loved us and blessed us and sent us on our way?
Who has pointed us toward the path and posted the signs we need to find our way?
Who has been at our side when the road has been smooth and gently curving?
Who has kept with us through perilous turns and dragging delays and detours?
Who will celebrate with us when we complete our course and seek the comfort of eternity?
Only One. The One and Only.
Holy One. The One and Holy.
Will we choose this day to stay faithful to the One who is faithful to us?
Count us in.
Will we choose this day to place your whole trust in the One who is trustworthy?
Count us in.
Will we choose this day to commit our talents and our resources to the One who first endowed them?
Count us in.
Will we choose this day to love the One who loved us first?
Count us in.
Praying together,
We devote ourselves to you by renewing the covenant—
the promise you made to humanity so long ago.
Because you are our God, we will be your people.
Enlarge our faithfulness, our trust, our commitment and our love
so that we may graciously uphold our piece in this relationship.
Help us always to recognize your presence and your blessings
throughout our journey.

Keep us in your care.

We lift to you the events in our lives:

- In celebration we raise in thanksgiving over 75 MCC blankets that were made this week within our church.
- In compassion we ask guidance as our communities locally and internationally face the ongoing election season. May you show us how to act with mercy and seek out justice at all levels of our society.
- In grief we place into your arms Dianne Mckinnel's family as they mourn the loss of her brother in law John Simpson.
- In care we ask your presence with all those who are experience health concerns at this time.
- In comfort we lay before you all those in our community we are facing lockdown and the isolation that accompanies this state. We name particularly Frieda Rempel's brother who is living at the Lighthouse, and all those who live in long term care facilities at this time

We welcome you into every piece of our lives, named allowed and in our hearts.

Trusting in your love and faithfulness.

Amen.

Scripture Readings – Joshua 24:1-3a; 14-25 & Amos 5:18-24

Prayer before scripture:

O come, let us sing to the Lord,

Let us rejoice in the rock of our salvation.

We sing to you, O God, and bless your name;

And tell of your saving grace from day to day.

We proclaim your glory to all creation,

Your praise to the ends of the earth.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

Joshua 24:1-3a; 14-25

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, and called a summit of the elders, leaders, judges, and officials of Israel. Once they presented themselves before God, Joshua said to the whole assembly, "This is the word of YHWH, the God of Israel: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your ancestors Sarah and Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led them through the entire region of Canaan. I made Sarah and Abraham's descendants numerous.'"

Joshua then said, "I now call upon you to revere and serve YHWH completely and sincerely. Cast off the gods that your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt, and worship YHWH alone. If you do not want to worship YHWH, then make the decision today whom you will worship, even if it is the gods of your ancestors beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you live. As for me and my household, we will worship YHWH.

Then the people responded, "Far be it from us to Abandon YHWH to worship other gods. It was YHWH our God who brought us and our ancestors up and out of the land of slavery. YHWH performed those great signs before our eyes. YHWH protected us on the entire journey and among all the peoples whose lands we passed

through. YHWH drove out before us the Amorites and all the people dwelling in the land. We too will serve YHWH, who is our God.”

Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve YHWH. This is a God who is holy, a jealous God, a God who doesn’t forgive your transgressions and your sins. If you desert YHWH and serve foreign gods, after all God has done for you, you will bring disasters – fatal ones – upon yourselves.”

But the people protested, “No! We will serve YHWH! Then Joshua said, “You are your own witnesses that you are choosing to serve YHWH” “Yes, we are the witnesses,” they replied. “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the alien gods among you and turn your hearts to YHWH, the God of Israel,” Then the assembly said to Joshua, “We will serve and obey YHWH our God!” On that day Joshua ratified the covenant with the people and drew up statutes and ordinances from them at Shechem.

Amos 5:18-24

You who wish for the Day of YHWH to come – why do you want it?

What will the Day of YHWH mean to you?

It will be a day of darkness, not light!

It will be like running from a lion only to meet a bear,

or like getting home safe at last, only to get bitten by a snake hiding in the corner!

Rest assured: the Day of YHWH will be darkness, not light.

It will all be gloom, without a single ray of light.

I despise and reject your feasts!

I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies!

When you offer me burnt offerings, I reject your oblations,
and refuse to look at your sacrifices of fattened cattle!

Spare me the racket of your chanting!

Relieve me of the strumming of your harps!

Instead, let justice flow like a river,
and righteousness flow like an unfailing stream.

Scripture Response:

For the Word of God in Scripture,

For the Word of God among us,

For the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God!

Sermon – Renewing our Covenant by Nora Pederberg

The words of our last song bring to mind the final verses from our Amos scripture text, **“Let justice flow like a river, and righteousness flow like an unfailing stream.”** On this Peace Sunday we are challenged by today’s scriptures to reflect on what it means for us to examine our covenant to follow God, living out an ethic of justice and peace. Discovering who we are in God is an ongoing process, and so our covenant to be people of God must also be continually nourished to evolve with our context. As we adapted this Sunday’s service, I reflected on how much change our church has gone through in the past months; the acts of constant innovation and lament as we evolve have defined every aspect of how we exist as a community of Faith. Author Ronald Heifetz teaches that **“an experience of change can be an opportunity to remember the foundations on which we are built...what elements are essential and must be preserved...change is a chance to remind ourselves of the unique characteristics that make us who we are.”** I see this teaching being played out in our Joshua text for this morning.

Joshua has reached an old age and has gathered the community together to send them into their inheritance before the end of his life. He lays out the history of YHWH’s companionship and presence, and then challenges them, telling them they must now choose the life they are going to live, to **“make the decision today who you are going to worship.”** The prophet warns that following God will uproot everything. It will mean letting go of their previous traditions of worship and resisting the idols that they will be tempted by in the future. Joshua stresses that this decision is a commitment that will impact every aspect of their lives. There is no piece of their lives that remains outside of this choice. It is a call to critical discernment and instruction, to understand obedience as a dynamic transposition rather than a flat adherence to the rules.

To fully understand this demand, we need to remember the setting this speech takes place in. Joshua was not calling individuals to commit their lives to God – he was asking the community what their choice will be. Even in his famous proclamation, **“as for me and my household, we will serve YHWH,”** he is roping his family into this promise. There is no separating the ties that bind people together; they are faithful together or they stray together. This way of understanding loyalty can feel uncomfortable to modern values of self responsibility and individuality. But this bible passage has no such division. To reflect on loyalty to God is to take ownership of how the community will choose to be a people of faith.

When we come together to worship as a body of faith, we are binding our lives to one another. Not because we have to, but because we choose to. In our prayers of the people today we prayed words of renewing our covenant relationship to God, and then followed this with holding up the joys and concerns of our community. To understand the covenant as a communal decision creates space for us to reflect on what it means to be a peace church, and who we are accountable to in this promise to follow God. Sometimes accountability gets a negative connotation tied around it, like it is synonymous with reprimands and judgement. I think accountability is one of the greatest gifts we receive in being part of a community. It is an assurance that we are not in this alone. Others are making this promise with us, and have bound their journey towards justice with our own. It means when we aren’t sure what the next loving act is, we have a community to discern with us and to share the work of peace.

Our Amos text is actually written in the form of a funeral song. It is harsh on our ears and jarring for our hearts to dwell on the verses, but there is freedom and hope within them yet. Amos is a prophet that is a part of this community; these are the people that he has bound his life to. It is because of this that Amos shares a poem that comes from a place of deep grief. The community has lost their integrity, they have become so accustomed to a society built on harm that they are not aware of their own woundedness. It is painful, excruciating, to work for justice in a world that is built on systematic oppression. So, Amos asks the community **“What will the day of YHWH mean to you?”**

He has no time for a worship service that is devoid of a life of justice, for these practices are hollow where justice is lacking. He condemns upholding rituals around the law for the sake of piety rather than love. Amos is not arguing that worship is wrong, but is saying that the appearance of worship means nothing without the hearts of the worshippers. Worship is not a box we can check but an act that works to centre our hearts once again in God's will for this world. This community will lose much of its structure if it chooses the way of justice. As Glennon Doyle writes: **"The building of the true and beautiful means the destruction of the good enough."** The prophet's outcry is at the people's complacency and lack of imagination around what the world could be.

I come to today's scriptures feeling exhausted and overwhelmed in the work of justice. The call to continually renew this covenant and create a better world seems like too big a job. And at this point I read over the final words of the Amos text again **"Let justice flow like a river, and righteousness flow like an unfailing stream."** These verses are the core of Amos' call to the community, because even when the work feels like darkness, and it feels like there is hit after hit in our world that we are left to recover from, the day of YHWH remains. It is not in some far-off time of light, but here in the present, with us when all seems dark. God remains with us, a constant river whose life-giving water can be depended upon each day.

It is not our role to be the source, for it is God that began the covenant, choosing to love us and bring peace to the world. We get to choose the relationship of this covenant, the nurturing of this community, that frees us from the weight of the world. It is a choice to be filled with love, to commit to hope and belief in the river of justice. To follow the advice of the Horse from Matt's children's story today: **"When the dark clouds come, keep going. When the big things feel out of control focus on the things you love right under your nose."**

We have covenanted to work for peace, to be a people who act justly and seek mercy. And when this is challenging and we no longer have the motivation to keep going, we have the relationships that keep us going. We have a support system of accountability and guidance, because our commitment to love begins in our commitment to one another on this journey to peace. Inevitably we will fail, but this flowing river is sourced from more than our own will power, it is our entire household that flows on, turning us back and holding us within our commitment to love. May we all be blessed with experiencing the gift of this covenant life, rarely easy, always good.

Amen.

Resources: New Interpreters Bible Commentary; Believers Church Bible Commentary; The Happiness Prayer by Rabbi Evan Moffic; Untamed by Glennon Doyle

Song 🎵 - **Alleluia by Tom Wuest** (*Brass Trumpet Publishing 2017 – Burn This as a Light*)

ALLELUIA

Psalm 88; Matthew 2:13–23, 5:10; Amos 5; Revelation 21

Key: F Signature: 4/4

Guitar: Capo 5 (C chords)

F B^b C F
Stay close, my child, through this dark night

F B^b C
Rest in the shadow of these wings

F B^b C F
Hope in the Lord whose day will come

F B^b C F
The dawn of “making all things new”

F B^bC F
Alleluia, alleluia

F B^bC Dm
Alleluia, alleluia

Dm B^bC Dm
Alleluia, alleluia

Dm B^bC F
Alleluia, alleluia

F B^b C F
All wars will cease, suffering end

F B^b C F
Justice will roll, the Kingdom come

F B^b C F
Love will arise, grace will uphold

F B^b C F
Mercy will heal where the Lamb reigns

Benediction (*Adapted from Jan Richardson "The Cure for Sorrow"*)

There is none that can stop this blessing from God,
until this blessing has spoken its final word,
until this blessing has breathed its benediction in every place:

Peace.

Peace.

Peace.