

Immanuel United Church
The fourth Sunday, March 14

The Canadian Prairies: A Candlelighting service

Prelude

Greeting

Welcome to This House of Prayer and Praise: (Rev. Paul Walfall)

On August 28, 1833, the Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies received royal assent and became law throughout the British Empire. The Act came into force on August 1, 1834. Prior to this in Upper Canada, now Ontario, in 1793, Governor John Graves Simcoe passed the Anti-slavery Act. This law freed enslaved people aged 25 and over and made it illegal to bring enslaved people into Upper Canada. The year 2021 will mark the 187th anniversary of total abolition of slavery in Canada. We pause to acknowledge this moment in history. We remember as we worship and commit ourselves to continue to work for a world where righteousness and justice will be found everywhere.

Call to Worship: **Cradle of Love**

God is love, and where God is there is love. There is no fear in love, perfect love casts out fear;
Let us celebrate the wonderful love that God has for all God's creation.

Light candle.

Hymn: VU 117 ***Jesus Christ is Waiting***

Scripture reading: John 3:14-17, 20-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten Child, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Child into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

The Choir Anthem: Down to the River to Pray

Sermon

Please watch the Storyhive documentary on Amber Valley:

Secret Alberta: The Former Life of Amber Valley. <https://youtu.be/OxXJubB2cPQ>

Winner of the 2018 Canadian Screen Award for Excellence in Digital Storytelling; About 100 km North of Edmonton is Amber Valley, one of the first all-Black settlements in Canada. Arriving in 1909, the pioneers of this community battled the elements and racism to not only survive but thrive.

In the early 1900s the Canadian Prairies gained some unexpected migrants through their US advertisements for new Canadian settlers. European migrants from Germany and Ukraine were moving across Canada in droves, and many had already settled in Northern Alberta, but a different wave of migrants were about to embark upon Alberta. They were post-slavery American Black migrants from Oklahoma, and they were headed for Amber Valley, which is just on the outskirts of Athabasca, AB.

The first wave of Amber Valley pioneers were led by a pastor, Henry Steed, in 1909. It is hard to imagine how anyone, Black or White, would take their families on such a treacherous trip from Oklahoma to northern Alberta, and especially in the days of little to no infrastructure. What a gruelling experience that must have been—to come to settle in the Great North with minus 50 weather. According to the *National Post*, Canadian Whites weren't at all crazy about the idea of a bunch of "coloured folk" coming to settle in Alberta, but they took no action against talks of the migration because they strongly doubted that Black people (even those dodging Jim Crow laws) would want to or be able to survive the northern Alberta winters.

In Isaiah 40:21–31, we explore a message of comfort and hope to the Israelites.

**Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God'?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.**

It was prophesied that the people of Israel would be in exile, and that they would need this message as a reminder of the power of God and of God's ultimate love for them. This scripture focuses on God's enabling of God's people to combat weariness and fragility to a position of strength and hopefulness, much like our Amber Valley pioneers.

Voice A: We all know what it's like to feel weary and worn from problems that plague us.

Voice B: Sometimes our tiredness comes from watching the world around us fall apart, and we become overwhelmed with helplessness.

Isaiah's message to us is that we need to encourage each other to stay the course, just as Isaiah was encouraging his people to stay the course. Do you not know that God can do all things? Haven't you heard how God has brought oppressors to their knees? Do you not know that God will lift you up? We need to be a source of encouragement to our Black siblings and cousins.

Voice A: Offering moral support when a relation faces injustice or fear of injustice.

Voice B: Making a pledge to stand against bigotry and oppression.

Voice A: Continual prayers for our Black siblings and cousins.

Voice B: We won't arrive unless we arrive together.

The human mind and flesh are weak, and we will falter and grow weary. We will become discouraged and hopeless in times of hardship. We aren't capable of surviving strife without a hand up from God. When we turn from God, we miss the buoy that God sends to keep us afloat in times of trouble. Isaiah 40:21–31 invites us to put our hope in God so that God will renew our strength for the battles in our own lives and the battles for peace, fairness, and justice for all people. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: VU 670 ***Precious Lord, Take My Hand***

<https://youtu.be/qxVpHiyT5kE>

<https://youtu.be/GcOs5kSFqvo>

Candle of Remembering

Let us light a candle to remember those who have been affected by the transatlantic enslavement of African peoples and all who even today are affected by slavery and its legacy.

Light candle.

Sorrow Song: ***I'm a Rollin' through this unfriendly world*** (Bessie Jones)

<https://youtu.be/nQnTJBwv2iA>

Prayers of the People:

Let us pause to remember those who have been enslaved. We recall that for over 400 years, more than 15 million people were the victims of the tragic transatlantic slave trade. During this time human beings made in the image of God were bought and sold, treated as property, and considered to be less than human.

**Have mercy on us, O God. Help us to regard all persons as made in your image.
Create in us a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within us.**

Hymn: VU 617 **I Love You, God, Who Heard My Cry** <https://youtu.be/9E5e1TpEqb4>

Let us pause to remember the families that were broken by enslavement. We recall the parents who never saw their children. We recall the family ties that were broken because of forced separation, the tears that were shed, the bitterness caused, and the hurts that continue.

**Help us O God, to regard others with love and kindness.
Create in us a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within us.**

Let us pause to remember the ways we continue in our world to treat others based on the financial profit we can derive from them: the persons who work in poor conditions and who are underpaid, the children who are forced to work and receive less than minimum wage, the migrant workers who are exploited.

**Help us, O God, to live in right relations with others.
Create in us a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within us.**

Candle of Hope

We light a candle of hope. Hope because God is still at work in our world. We believe that love is stronger than all the ills of the world. The legacies of slavery still exist in our world, and persons of African descent are still the recipients of racism; these are some of the realities in our world. We are called to let the light of God's love shine in the world.

Light candle.

Call to Commitment

As we light this candle, let us also commit ourselves to bear the light of the hope of our lives. In so doing, let us commit ourselves to work for a world that is more just, more loving, and more caring, and where we live in right relations.

Light candle

Hymn: VU 691 **Though Ancient Walls**

Benediction:

In a world where we have, in the past, enslaved and dehumanized others,
we go to treat each person with dignity and respect.

In a world where profit is valued more than human life,
we go to proclaim the priceless worth of each person.
In a world where the ugliness of racism and White supremacy is found,
we go to show that love conquers all social ills.

Postlude:

Make Them Hear You (Bison Men's Chorus, MB, Canada)

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/when-injustice-strikes-make-them-hear-you-cms-15928/>

To listen to the recorded music, you will need to enter:

USERNAME: bison

PASSWORD: herd

Go out and tell the story.
Let it echo far and wide.
Make them hear you.
Make them hear you.

How that justice was our battle
And how justice was denied.
Make them hear you.
Make them hear you.

And say to those who blame us
For the way we chose to fight
That sometimes there are battles
Which are more than black or white.
Go out and tell our story
To your daughters and your sons.
Make them hear you.
Make them hear you.

Your sword can be a sermon
Or the power of the pen.
Teach every child to raise his voice
And then, my brothers, then
Will justice be demanded
By ten million righteous men.
Make them hear you.
When they hear you

I'll be near you again.



Marking the Legacy of Slavery in Canada and the British Commonwealth

Theme: All Are Made in the Image of God

—By the Rev. Paul Douglas Walfall, First United Church, Fort Saskatchewan, AB

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On Eagles Wings: A Service for Black History Month

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