

May 16th, 2021
Immanuel United Church

Welcome

Call to Worship:

Praise the Living One!

We praise the God of the heavens and skies and earth.

Praise the Living One!

We praise the God of all creation!

Praise the Living One!

We come to worship! Hallelujah!

Prayer:

As the leaves return to the trees,
So your love returns to your people.

**As the warmth returns to the land,
So your grace embraces us.**

As the birds return to familiar waters,
**God of new life,
Help us to migrate to your beauty,
To your embrace. Amen.**

Hymn: MV 37 *Each Blade of Grass (Circle of God)*

Scripture: John 6:1-14

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples,

'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

The Choir Anthem: What does the Lord Require of You?

Message: Praising Verbs in May's Long Weekend

Finally, the May long weekend Manitoba gardeners have anticipated for months is here! Last week was grand. The beautiful, hot planting season started. Neighbourhood decks, balconies, planters and flower beds become vibrant and colourful. It's a wonderful season for our animal neighbours too, especially birds! Starting a month ago, I noticed that, often when I went out to our deck, a female downy woodpecker, who seemed to firmly believe that one of the big birch trees in our back yard was hers, literally "barked" and fled, annoyed by my sudden appearance. If I disappeared, or hid, the upset woodpecker would come back and keep doing her business, wanting no more interruption. Two weeks passed, and Jah-bi and I found that she had made four holes in a vertical row in that birch tree; we saw the female woodpecker come out of the bottom hole together with a very handsome, red-headed male woodpecker! The two got very busy in the following days. While I was planting my baby lavender shoots which I had grown from seeds or was having a Council meeting on zoom outdoors, I saw the pair go in and out of their tree-house every half an hour. Father waits, Mother comes out. Mother waits, Father comes out. I wonder if there are babies in there and they take turns feeding them. No proof yet! In the meantime, my partner, Min-Goo, and I quickly adjusted ourselves to become like those woodpecker parents. Our two kids stayed at home full time, 24/7, as schools in Manitoba moved to remote learning. They ate with us, three times a day. This is my report about the days in the second week of the third lockdown in Manitoba - which ironically invited me to an opportunity to nurture a sense that I am surrounded in the circle of God.

At a glance, my story might sound like a typical pandemic tale any parent could tell after the school announcements were made.

However, the truth is that the days were full of new surprises spinning dizzily over my head in this warm, fantastic, Spring season.

In my story, I never mention a single word about God. It does not mean that God was/is absent from it. It is how I interpret how God is with me, with us. Have you ever

studied grammar? Figuring out which words in a sentence are nouns and which ones are verbs? If you perceive God only as a noun, I clearly didn't mention or reflect God in the story. But if we develop a sense to find God in verb form, manifested in an activity, my story is full of God.

I try to reach God, to find God in my own story, and one verb stands out to me... "Feed!" Make a home. Protect. Care. "Get busy" to grow young ones. These remind me of God's activity. God - even though God as a noun is never mentioned, said, noted - was present in the activities.

We live in a noun-focused culture. Things. Property. Objects. Subjects. Stuff. Items. Belongings. Possessions. Collections. Clutter.

This week, an insight came to me: what if we try to find God in verb form, rather than nouns. For example, if we say, "God is like morning." What we actually want to say may be "The Kingdom of God *breaks in*, like the morning's sunrise; light *becomes* more powerful than the night." Then, for me the verbs, "breaks in" "becomes", as God's activities, spark actions to imitate God. I see God as a verb, when we try to change things for the benefit of others, to give light to others, and to become a light to those who are in shadow. In our actions and hopes God is fully present.

I have lived in Manitoba since 2014, nearly seven years now, and over the years, what I've concluded is that Manitoba gardeners can't wait. We can't be patient. I bought some indoor plants for the first time in my life, this year, and enjoyed the thrill of repotting them in beautiful pots. Also, I tried to grow lavender, larkspur, and cosmos from seeds even before the May long weekend would open full gardening options to Manitobans. I watered each pot, after putting new potting soil in them. The water gurgled quietly as it soaked the soil and filled the gaps and air pockets within the soil. In that moment, God, the living water, became a verb in the water's action. Fill. Soak. Change. Nurture. Grow. Sustain. Then, I remembered that one sunny day in my twenties, I was walking on my university campus. I walked head down, mind dark, heart crying, soul thirsty, like dry dirt in a pot, asking myself, "Why is my mind like this?"

Then a word visited me, appeared to me, interrupted me, joined me like a ruby-crowned kinglet visiting our backyard's wild plum tree.

God.

God!

Immediately, I understood. God was what I had been missing. In that moment the noun from my childhood became a verb for my adulthood. The Living One revealed Oneself, made Oneself known to me, filled, soaked, changed the world around me. I had everything: soil, minerals, sunlight, everything, except for water, which I lacked completely. God became the verb. The living water provided life. "Yahweh Jireh" (which means, in Hebrew, The Living One will "provide", Genesis N.)

Today's Gospel story from John also reveals to us God as verb. What strikes me most in today's reading is the activity, as the verb, that creates a faithful community: 'sit'. "Jesus sat down there with his disciples... Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down... Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all... Jesus distributed the loaves to those who were seated.'" To sit, to gather around the Living One. With each other. To share the meal. To look for the unexpected. To preserve the holy from the unholy powers. Jesus sits with us to hold the living Word high, an act that makes our lives, each one of our lives, sacred. Jesus is the one who shows the actions of God, what God, the Kingdom of God, is like in motion, how God moves in us and in the world. Verbs as sacred ministry; blessings springing up from living, flowing water as plants spring up from the warm, watered earth.

Hymn: VU 395 *Come In, Come In and Sit Down*

Prayers of the People: Spirit - Partner

Spirit of the Living God,

Partner on our journey,

Give us courage to explore the sacred places of our beings — the verbs in our life:

Fill. Soak. Change.

Provide. Protect.

Sit with Jesus.

Sit with a beloved community - friends and families. Even if it is possible only in virtual ways.

Sit with you. In deep personal ways, no matter what.

Help us to listen to and acknowledge the messages from our hearts.

And from you, the Living One.

Grace us to solitudes and companionship;

Grace us to holy action in thought and speech.

We pray for (people and situations) in our hearts.

Shepherd us by quiet waters .

Shelter us in sacred groves.
Ground us and enfold us in holy mystery.

Divine Distributor of Life's Treasures...
Help us to collect the gems of gratitude in the lockdown treasure box.
Divine Gardener of Life's Blossoms,
Give us warmth in season of despair,
So we may know that you surround us
With eternal love,
Forever and ever, Amen.

Hymn: MV 126 *Are You a Shepherd?*

Benediction:

Go with joy. God's hope be in you.
God's peace spread through you.
God's laughter ring in your heart.
Christ is risen, indeed.
Let the whole world rejoice!

Annual Meeting follows at noon.