

August 8th, 2021  
Immanuel United Church

**With commemoration of Emancipation Day on August 1st.**

“On this Emancipation Day, remembering the ancestors - - those who made the transatlantic journey and those whose bodies remain in the Atlantic. Mindful of the continuing impact of the legacy of slavery and the need of continuing the Emancipation journey.” ~ Michale Blair, General Secretary of The United Church of Canada

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Come everyone, Minnedosa United Church and Immanuel United Church,  
All ages and stages. Come worship together!

**We are here to show our love to God.**

Come worship, everyone, you who are made in God’s image,  
An image reflected in all shapes and colours.

**We are here to share our joys and our sorrows,  
Our hopes and our dreams.**

Come, let us worship, for God is with us, in this place.

PRAYER:

**From the tops of our heads to the tips of our toes,**

**We are your beloved children, O God.**

**You know our joys, frustrations, triumphs, and tragedies.**

**You know where we feel weak and where we feel strong.**

**We are your beloved children, O God.**

**You hold us. You help us. You comfort us.**

**You keep our hearts soft with your compassion,**

**So that we may share your love in this world.**

**For this, we give you thanks, Amen.**

HYMN: MV 30 *It's a Song of Praise to the Maker*

SCRIPTURE: John 6:35, 41-51

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves.

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

REFLECTION: Keeping the Faith like Olympic Athletes

After a lot of criticism, concern, protest and worry, the Tokyo Olympics 2020 finally lifted its Olympic flame. It's not all perfect, but what stands out beautifully for me is the passion (fighting spirit) of the Olympic athletes. And the outstanding performance which each player has put all their mind, heart and effort into, shines brighter than the flame.

Every fourth year, I have never missed watching the summer Olympics opening and closing ceremonies. I like to enjoy the games of the teams I cheer for. How about you? What has been the most memorable game you've watched in the Tokyo Olympics? Which teams do you cheer for? To be honest with you, my family purchased a VPN to enable us to watch games from the Korean TV channels. My sports brain gets enlightened when we watch games with Korean commentators and cheer for Korean teams. (Trust me, I do love Canada!) Personally, in Tokyo Olympics 2020, ping pong, volleyball, fencing, and Taekwondo games were really memorable. Each Olympics has taught me a lesson. At each different stage of life I see different things from a game and I learn a new lesson. As I grow older and my life experience becomes deeper and larger, there is room for me to find new wisdom for life, just from watching how athletes play their games.

Tokyo Olympic athletes have shown me that in each game, consistently from the first ball to the very last one, no matter whether they are losing by a big gap in the score or fighting an intense deuce match, if it is a right ball, they never give up, never let it go. Players keep faith, (especially when doing so can be very hard) and steady themselves with everything they can try with the ball, regardless of how they might feel inside and how many minutes or seconds are left in the game. I was very impressed in an Épée fencing quarterfinal game when a Korean commentator made an impressive speech and said with encouragement and affection for the Korean player “끝까지! 끝까지!” This means, “to the end! Until the end! Until it finishes! Until you finish it!” That’s the only thing the player could do in that moment, and that’s the only way the player could win. It was my first time to watch a fencing game entirely, and I learned some rules. Let me explain as much as I can... (smile) two players move very close to each other, and then, there’s nothing but to throw swords at each other, fight, and score, to do so, they can’t stop. They just need to keep thrusting until one, or both, of them makes the score (called *par-le-deux*).

I also followed and watched Korean women’s ping pong and volleyball games. I especially enjoyed the ping pong game in which the 17-year-old Korean player versed the 58 year old masterful player (originally a Chinese athlete who now represents Luxembourg). What these outstanding players share in common, regardless of which country they represent, or their age, is that in principle, they must keep the faith to the end, until the end, until the match finishes, until they finish the game. They do not give up. They never stop, even if it is obvious that they are losing the set. Regardless of winning or losing they are after the ball, they throw themselves at it, even if adding just one more score will not lead to winning the set. Athletes play the same way to the end as they do from the start.

This observation allows me an insight with which to watch church ministry as a game, or my life as a game, as an Olympic athlete would do. Keep the faith to the end, until the end, until we finish it. Anxiety and panic are the big challenges to overcome when athletes are in their games, just like they can affect and touch our lives: about the future, about the past. Guilt, mistakes, or the fear that good moments in our lives, if we are having them, might disappear or end. When it feels like things in our lives are fixed and unchangeable, we tend to feel helpless, fear that we are not enough. Doubt. Fatigue takes the set.

Keep the faith. Play like an Épée fencing player. Throw your sword, employing the right ways you can try, until and to the end, for one more score, for one more game. Even if you may not win today, that’s ok. That’s what we would say when our athletes come back from the game. Keep the faith. Do not panic. Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6) Keeping the faith shouldn’t mean that we become like a robot, and inflexibly or rigidly chase after pre-set goals. I believe keeping the faith means to trust that living bread is here. Jesus, Christ, the Earth, however you put the Presence into words... Paradise, Heaven, gratitude, deep presence of peace... is here with me, here with us. We can lead a game like a winner, no matter the score ... no matter whether it seems we are winning or losing. We trust and pursue the presence. Trusting,

awareness, and appreciation of the living bread's abundance changes our lives and steadies the blessings. We can continue this game. We can start a new game. Knowing that Jesus is with us, trusting that Jesus, the Earth-Christ, feeds us and nurtures us, is a great source of support from which any Olympic athlete would need to take a big benefit. So, keep your faith. Keep this game. May Jesus, the Living Bread, Bread of Life, feed your body, feed your soul, until you leave the stadium and return home.

HYMN: MV 194 *Bread of Life Feed My Soul*

COMMUNION:

May God be with us.

**God is here among us.**

Let us open our hearts to God.

**We open them to God and to one another.**

Let us give thanks to God.

**It is right to give thanks and praise.**

Ever-living God, we do give you thanks and praise  
for you are majestic in holiness, yet ever near,  
**a worker of wonders, yet plain in your presence.**

In the beginning you created the universe.

You made the sun and stars above our heads,  
**and the earth beneath our feet.**

Your word brought forth the rocks and streams,  
**the surging seas and the wild winds.**

You fashioned life in all its myriad forms,  
**and shaped from clay the wonder of the human frame.**

You spoke your word to your people  
through prophets and poets,  
People of compassion and courage.

You came in Jesus, the Word made flesh,  
to live and love this life in all its fullness—  
only to be shunned, despised, and forsaken.

You made the cross of death **a tree of life,**  
the empty grave **a sign of hope,** like the meteor shower in August.  
Therefore, with all your people,  
and with the whole company of heaven and all creation,  
we sing your praise:

**Lord of lords, Creator of all things,**

**nature gives thanks,  
your creatures give thanks.  
Your praise rises in us like the great river.  
God of all things, Creator, Provider,  
we thank you in the name of Jesus, Love Incarnate.**

We do what Jesus did the night before he died.  
He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread,  
and gave it to his friends, and said,  
**“Take, eat; remember me.”**  
Then he took the cup, and said,  
**“Take, drink; remember.”**

At this time, we also remember all those  
with whom you would have us share your feast.  
We pray for all who are in sorrow or in pain . . .  
all who are ill or alone . . .  
all who live with fear, oppression, or hunger . . .  
all whom the world counts as last and least . . . .  
for the nations as they strive for peace and justice . . .  
for the earth, and the fragile web of life we share . . .  
for our families and friends . . . .

We praise you, eternal God,  
through Christ your Word made flesh,  
and in the power of your life-giving Spirit,  
now and forever.

And so this is our prayer. So be it! Amen!  
**Amen!**

We gather these and all our prayers,  
thankful that we may turn to you  
as **to our Mother who loves us, as:**  
**Our Father, who art in heaven . . .**

The bread of tomorrow.  
The cup of new life.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION:

Holy One,  
though we live in a world of need,

**here we have tasted your goodness  
and hungered for a world more just.**

Here we have heard your call  
**to be a people of healing community.**  
Though daily we touch our limits,  
**here we have received  
the fullness of your grace.**

Send us forth, O God,  
**in faith, in hope, and in love.**  
**Amen.**

HYMN: VU 595 *We Are Pilgrims*