

Immanuel United Church  
Oct 24th, 2021

Welcome

Call to Worship:

Come to this sacred place  
**that we create together with the Spirit.**  
Come to this sanctuary / zoom  
**that is a safe space for all,  
filled with people who care for one another.**  
Come to this moment in time  
**with praise, with love, and with hope!**

Prayer:

**Loving God, you who are the centre of all being, we begin our worship today with a thankful heart. We call to mind the many ways our lives are made better just by knowing that your unconditional love and acceptance is a part of who we are. May this time together be guided by your Holy Spirit and may we be uplifted and strengthened in your love and light, so we may channel that love and light into the world. This we pray in the name of the one who is the light of the world, Jesus, Love Incarnate. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 402 *We Are One*

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants

over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

The Anthem: let There be Joy In this Place

Let there be joy in this place (~ new verse)  
Can we find ourselves together?  
Can we feel the future brightening?  
Will our faith help us to melt the fear away?  
Can we recognize with gratitude?  
How our God holds every one of us?  
NOw can we let the joy be welcomed on this day?

Reflection: The Art of Gathering With Jesus

Have you ever hosted a gathering at your home, at your workplace, at church, or anywhere you serve or belong to?

Which gatherings were especially memorable to you, among those you hosted or attended?

What is the one gathering that remains in your memory as your favourite, one that you cannot wait to tell others about, when you get the chance? What was it that made it so special, meaningful, so heartwarming that you would love to host or attend it again?

One of my favourites was the baby shower for Jah-bi. I was pregnant when my family moved to Ladysmith for my husband's ministry at Ladysmith United Church. Three months after Jah-bi's birth, the church ladies threw me a big baby shower, the first and only baby shower I have ever attended. I had never heard of the concept of a baby shower until that year; it's not a custom in Korea, where I had my first child. About 50 women gathered and celebrated the birth of Jah-bi. I remember it took me more than an hour to open all the presents in front of all the people who were watching me with joy. It was a great gathering where everyone - adult women and girls - sat in a circle. There were no men there - and no boys, except for my baby.

Later, I read a story in which the author recalled her own baby shower. She and her partner were expecting their first child. Her girlfriends offered to throw a shower for her. She was excited, and so was her husband, until a problem arose. When she told him

about the shower, he asked if he could come. Initially she thought he was pulling her leg. Then she realized he was serious. He really wanted to attend her baby shower. At first, she thought his request made no sense. But in time, she wondered if he had a point.

Traditional baby showers were rituals for expecting mothers; a collective way to help a couple defray the costs of tending to a new life. The assumed format of this ritual - women gathering around women - reflected an era when the only person who really needed to prepare for parenting and a new transformative identity was the mother. Long story short, the author and her partner decided to focus on the values they cherish rather than the ritualized form - women only - and to represent it in their gathering - which would be, then, a novel gathering: a shower for both parents, with the equal participation of the father and other male guests in their ceremony to celebrate the value of parenting equally. They wished to be witnessed in their circle as a couple/family parenting in full and actual equality, not as a mom raising a child with a dad who "helps." It could be "disputable" (p. 20, "The Art of Gathering" by Priya Parker ) that a baby shower should include a man, and, what is more, be reorganized around his and potentially other men's presence. But it is disputable in a good way.

I find both baby shower experiences – the one I experienced and the one the author recalls - are memorable because there were novel/disputable elements that led to thoughtful inclusion. For my shower, the community welcomed a newcomer with all the fondness they would show for a close friend. For the writer's shower, the community opened to include both sexes. These novel approaches could also inspire the participants to think about their familiar cultural norms, to reshape and restructure the meaning and purpose of the gathering.

In today's reading, Jesus, as a good teacher, assists his disciples to think about the art of gathering with Jesus. At the time, even with the Torah, YHWH's teachings since ancient times, Jesus' disciples were more influenced by the pyramid model of society, community and relationship, in which only a few on top have all the power and rule the mass of those below. The disciples were dreaming of sitting in the second row, right under the top, where Jesus would sit, as Jesus' "right hand" and left hand, basking in God's glory. Jesus' response to them challenges their thinking to expand, to examine their assumptions about power. Jesus says to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Later, Jesus expounds his teaching to the other disciples, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

Jesus' teaching, as the art of gathering, was novel, disputable, unprecedented in his society. His model of gathering as God's children, as the church, is far from the hierarchical pyramid. It is much closer to a circle, where you cannot find which point in the 360-degree perimeter of the circle is the centre, or where the right and the left should be situated. The ritualized "forms" Jesus was most concerned about were not what to wear (the garments of a worship leader), where preachers should stand — at a traditional pulpit, a modern lectern, or a communion table - all the hallmarks of a 'legitimate' ministry, but the forms of life: how we give, bring, share life with others, how we drink the cup that Jesus drinks, how we are baptized every day anew with new ways and friendship that transform us. How are we becoming a circle of God, intentionally moving away from developing rigidity and resistance to change? How do we live our lives with flexibility, letting go of resentment and bitter feelings? Are we willing to yield like a willow for others, when necessary, rather than measuring and reinforcing our position? Can we change our questions from, *Am I higher? More secure? More comfortable?* to, *"Are we open enough, vulnerable enough, at odds enough with the status quo?"*

Jesus still assists us now in thinking about the art of gathering, especially in this interesting time in which we explore a dual service to serve the needs of both those who choose to worship on zoom and those who are excited to come to church to gather and worship in person. Who is invited? Who is allowed to come and worship at church? All of these questions, at this time, are still novel and disputable, with little precedent. The vaccine QR Code and ID; this is the requirement for all who wish to attend in person. Now, here's a new question: Even if one of us has been fully vaccinated, they can choose to not come in person, maybe because they cannot breathe well when wearing a mask. And zoom doesn't work for them at all. Could we find ways, using creativity and intention, to assist those of us who have particular needs and conditions to worship in person, if that's their ultimate preference and hope? A novel approach to inclusion helps us to think about why and how we gather (even if some might think it is "disputable" as it looks like others are given special treatment or exception.) It helps us to reflect together on the ritualized "form" that we cherish and commit to learning: not garments or pulpits, but asking what it is like to gather with equity, compassion, care and support, designing novel inclusion to be more like Christ's Circle — i.e. "open accessible, barrier-free church" — .

Creating an inclusive and meaningful gathering and worship, especially while we are still going through the current pandemic, is hard work. We will not forget these gathering to worship inside the four walls of the church, still connected wirelessly to (name all on Zoom today). The memory of today's gathering will remain with me for a long time - - especially of this rainbow (point to the new Amen corner wall with the

painted rainbow) adding a very special welcome to Immanuel's physical and spiritual space.

If today's worship and gathering is a memorable one for you because you are helping to host as leaders and volunteers, or that you attend for the joy of God being with us, think of it as your "ichi-go, ichi-e". It is a phrase that the sixteenth-century Japanese tea master Sen no Rikyu taught his students to keep in the front of their minds as they conduct the ancient rituals of the tea ceremony: Ichi-go, ichi-e. It roughly translates to "one meeting, one moment in your life that will never happen again." "We could meet again, but you have to praise this moment because in one year, we'll have a new experience, and we will be different people and will be bringing new experiences with us, because we are also changed."

Each gathering is singular - ichi-go, ichi-e.

The art of gathering with Jesus is ichi-go, ichi-e, leaning into the Christ Circle and ritualizing it with beauty in form, in words, in songs, in arts, and in flexibility, risking novel forms of inclusion, always willing to explore transformation.

Let us make today memorable, and make tomorrow open.

Hymn: VU 371 *Open My Eyes, that I May See*

Offering Payer:

As we gather in our offering of a portion of our living, our time, our thoughts, our ideas, and our prayers for each other, let us sing (*an offering hymn*)

**Holy One, we delight in giving back and paying forward through our gifts and donations here today. Bless these gifts abundantly for the benefit of whomever they serve, wherever they serve. Amen.**

Prayers of the People

Hymn: VU 427 *To Show by Touch and Word*

Commissioning and Benediction:

**As Jesus called the children to come to him and the disciples to follow him, we too have a calling, a calling to live out the word, to be the love and do the work of Christ's church. May you feel rooted by your faith in God, inspired by the stories of Jesus, and lifted by the Guiding Spirit along your way. Amen.**