

Immanuel United Church  
Nov 14th, 2021

Welcome

Lighting the Christ Candle as Call to Worship:

In a world that can be chaotic and frightening,  
**we light a candle of hope.**

In a world where the way is uncertain,  
**may this light of Christ show us the way.**

Prayer:

**God of power and grace,  
open our hearts to know you care for us.  
Sustain us and give us generous spirits,  
that we may extend your compassion to others. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 248 *When Long Before Time*

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

The Choir Anthem: We Are the Children of God

Reflection: Forgive like the first vineyard workers.

Today I would like to begin with the story I shared with Immanuel's children this week via a YouTube video. It is a story about God's love and the way God loves us.

Recently, I visited one of our Immanuel families. I called ahead to tell them I was coming and the youngest ones in the family were waiting for me, watching through the window as I parked my car.

I received an exceptional welcome from the family. Their generosity made me really happy. Not only that, when I sat with them the youngest ones, Aria, Sophia and Grayson, hugged me and welcomed me as their guest. Not just once but several times. Three minutes later they came to me again to hug and say "hi", "welcome." Again 5 minutes later, they came and hugged me and showed me their little gifts like toys and books. They really wanted me to know that I was welcome.

God's love is like that. To God, it doesn't matter when you come to help. God loves you at 9 a.m. God loves you at 11 a.m. God loves you at 1 p.m. God loves you at 3 p.m., 5 p.m, 7 p.m, 9 p.m. and all through the night while you sleep, as well.

In today's story about the Vineyard Workers, Jesus says that God is generous. That God loves us generously.

I write this reflection holding in my heart the gifts of Aria, Sophia and Grayson and their siblings who showed me a generous welcome. Every 5 minutes, no matter what time I came. Especially when children shine, they are reminders of who and what God is like and what God would like to do. Aria, Sophia and Grayson showed me God's generous welcome.

In today's Gospel story, the day has turned to evening. The owner of the vineyard said to his manger, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. When the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and

you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”

There are many ways to understand this story, but today I wish to reflect on my recent personal experience related to forgiveness and healing/growth in light of Jesus’ parable of the vineyard workers. Sometimes it is true that, as we get older, we become more generous in our understanding, especially in terms of how we bring the other’s situations into the picture and accept them, both of the joys they bring to our lives and the mistakes they make. We try to be kinder, approach more gently, and extend compassion. We have learned and experienced how such practice based on caring can help us and bring positive changes and outcomes.

Thinking about today’s Gospel story in the reflection of my recent experience, I find an analogy between the first workers in today’s story who came early and started their work at 9 o’clock in the morning and our own life experience with “getting older”, or becoming mature with age. In the story the first workers have a hard time accepting the landowner’s call, “Be generous”, when the other workers who worked for just an hour receive the same daily wages as they did. The first workers grumble against the call because it hurts their long-held belief, their identity and sense of entitlement. More directly, it hurts them themselves. The first workers came before anyone else. They stayed longer than anyone else. They worked harder than anyone else. It is not easy to be a faithful vineyard worker and work on the ground for so many hours in the scorching heat, but they did it. Working under the scorching heat for hours could be a traumatic experience. An experience that shows life can be marked not only with joy but also with pain in the struggle to get to the envisioned destination of a life hoped for and claimed which includes convictions, brokenness, frustration, defeat, success, and all of that. Along the way as we build our lives our identity is shaped and reshaped, including the sense of who we are. When our vision is challenged, criticized, and/or faces the demand from others to rethink what we believe is right, it is not fun. It might cause feelings of hurt, bitterness and resentment. Our vision might become rigid, unwilling to move into the direction of forgiving those who have hurt us. I use the word “forgiving” not because I assume that the others could have actually “sinned” against us, but because forgiving is primarily a status of the heart’s. It is an action or movement that opens us to considering or “giving” us a new way of thinking of ourselves and others.

When we become rigid, it could mean that we might have forgotten the quality of welcome, love, acceptance of life that Aria, Sophia, Grayson showed me at my visit. The children offered me welcome several times within a very short visit. They showed me

the same welcome each time, no matter what time I came. The children's flexibility, creativity and uninterrupted joy resemble that of our Creator's.

In a recent dream, I was praying in English. (I have lived in Canada too long not to pray in English! What, 14 years? In comparison with some of my friends who migrated to Canada some 4 or 5 years ago, or even 2 or 3 years ago, I find myself relating to the first vineyard workers.)

In my prayer, I called God "God of rain, God of water". Then, I remembered the loving memories I had with childhood friends. I was probably similar in age to Aria, Sophia and Grayson's, and we were watching as rain dropped on and flowed down the window. Small rain drops were formed on the glass surface of the window and got bigger and got heavier. Then, they let go of the tension to stay where they first landed and flowed down. A lot of them, all the same. Korean language has many onomatopoeia words—words that phonetically imitates, resembles, or suggests the sound that it describes. The way we say the sound of the rain drops is by using , "주르륵 주르륵"(choo-roo-rook choo-roo-rook). Doesn't it really sound like rain hitting the window and flowing down the surface of the window? The raindrops flow and they are erased. The window glass shines reflecting the light in the prisms of water flowing on it. The rain drops knows no first, no last.

In the closing part of the prayer in my dream God asked me to make a room "literally and figuratively" outside of myself and also inside of myself, so that I am protected in a cocoon. The reason for making a cocoon rather than prematurely expressing anything outwards and therefore possibly hurting myself and others, was to make room for "much thinking." Thinking outside the box, thinking flexibly, thinking creatively. After all, in the case of forgiving it is not always about whether the other has actually "trespassed" against me, or "sinned" against me, but more about moving from self-pity to extending compassion "for giving" a new understanding of ourselves and others.

Jesus' words and teaching "Whoever wants to be first must be last, and servant of all" are profound and can move us to a space of grace for both the other and ourselves.

Then, my dream moved to a woman wearing a bright yellow dress. The dress flew like yellow pansy flower petals, or a California poppy. She was dancing a ballet, freely making a sophisticated choreography of joy and forgiveness, as if telling me that forgiveness is a way towards liberation.

Another thing the dream taught me was that such forgiveness happens when not only our broken spirit is mended but also our body is healed of its hurt. When hurting

happens mentally, we might not notice it immediately but it is also hurting our body too, as shown through the symptoms of aches and imbalance. The dance of the woman with the yellow pansy dress exposed her aspiration to be free, not only spiritually but also physically, from her bruises. Forgiving was happening within her because she took time to heal and thereby became physically healthier. Healing can happen through the caring from our relationships, but I also believe we all have a God-given inner ability to heal, which generates healing energy from within, especially in the process by which we move to forgive and are forgiven.

The vineyard workers who came first to help God at 9 am in the morning would need cocoon time until they can reach the understanding that we all need flexibility, creativity and joy of children no matter what time we have arrived in the vineyard. In my experience, children are more apt to forgive their friends or to ask for forgiveness because they very quickly find reasons to play together, to enjoy the present moment, and to discover new experiences with their friends. In the eyes of children, the rain drops flowing on the window are the beautiful marbles at which to wonder. Their words often form a cheerful poem. Somehow, children can maintain their healthy curiosity. Children do not really care much about the time of day. They know they like to welcome their guests, and they express their joy as they find satisfaction in sharing God's love with others. So, may we Forgive, like children. And may we Forgive, as the first vineyard workers are able to, after their cocoon time.

Hymn: VU 227 For the Fruit of All Creation

Offering Prayer:

We are invited to take part in God's great enterprise:  
of healing the earth,  
of caring for those who are vulnerable,  
of building up Christian community.  
Let us present our offerings this day  
as we join in God's great enterprise of love.

Hymn: VU 540 *Grant Us, God, the Grace*

Prayer:

**Loving God, we offer these gifts,  
in gratitude,  
in wonder,  
and in love.**

**May these be used to proclaim Jesus' story anew.  
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayers of the People:

God of rain,

God of water,

God of snow,

You are flowing in to all creation, and we praise you.

You still nourishes the earth, in the right timing with the right gift, for us to learn how to be thankful.

We see the depth of hope in the midst of changes especially when we are connected to you in the air, in the water, in the soil, in the wind on earth,  
When we walk, when we eat, when we touch, when we feel  
and we are connected to our body, and the stories and wisdom with which our body talks to us.

This is our prayer of praise to you,  
you who are in all that we are to be.  
We praise you, in all the places of your being.

We praise you in the spaces created by us, the mental landscape on gratitude.

We praise you in the good and the kind moments.  
We praise you in the hurt and pain.  
We praise you in our doubt.  
We praise you in the times of action.  
We praise you in the face of the neighbour known to us.  
We praise you in the neighbour that we have yet to know.  
We praise you at the start and at the end.  
We praise you with all that we have and are.

God, today, we pray for your presence.

We pray that our minds are not preoccupied with goals but rather compassion for ourselves and each other. With the gift of forgiving and the room that creates to offer a new thought about ourselves and others.

We pray that we find a moment of empathy and joy, both in planned and unexpected spaces.

We also pray for the faces and hearts who are dear to us,  
who are ill and lonely

who suffer from other's or inner judgements on themselves.  
For our family and friends, both near and far,  
those who are stressed in body, mind and spirit.  
We pray for peace, discernment, a cocoon time for sense of protection and growth.

Now, we lift up our intentions and hopes to God in this moment of silence.

God, today, we know that faith, hope and love mean more than a daily list of accomplishments. We pray that we meet our current life situations with deep breath and stillness, with the flexible movement and dance that trees, plants and flowers might try, and that we can reach out to others with our prayers for peace and joy. God, help us to enjoy sharing your love with others. Amen.

Hymn: *Take up His Song*

Commissioning and Benediction:

**Go in peace.**

**Go in the strength of God.**

**Go in love. Amen.**