

Immanuel United Church
October 31st, 2021

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship:

On this All Saints' Sunday, as we come to light our Christ candle, we give thanks, first of all, for all the saints who have held the Christ Light for us when we had no strength to hold it ourselves.

We give thanks for all the saints whose lives stand as witness to light and love, and who invite our light to join theirs.

And we give thanks also for those whose work for peace and justice, inspiring us to learn, grow, and discover our own light in this good work of healing the world with God's love.

(The Christ candle is lit.)

Prayer:

Holy One, we come from our houses, fields, apartments, condos, Concordia Village, and other places of residence. We come and celebrate the ministry of Christ's church in this place.

We come, Loving God, following the footsteps of Jesus, just as our forebears did.

We remember the people of all genders and all ages who have gathered in this place — sitting in a semi-circle, marvelled at the beauty of Advent and wonders, or serving those who came to enjoy our delicious Fowl Supper with warm hospitality.

We gather in the company of saints. We honour the faith that has been shared through caring relationships. For this faith and those who shared it, praise be to you, O God! Amen.

Hymn: MV 12 **Come Touch Our Hearts**

Scripture: Isaiah 25:6-8

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines

strained clear. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of God's people God will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

The Choir Anthem: VU 383 Come, O Holy Spirit, Come

Reflection:

Today, many people will enjoy Halloween. I am anticipating a very sweet night after our kids collect bags of treats. This is also the day when some Christians mark the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic Church's theology of salvation and sacraments, thus initiating the religious movement that became known as Protestantism. On the Sunday before October 31, Lutherans (and some Presbyterians and Congregationalists) recall these events in worship.

Diana Butler Bass, the author of her best selling book, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of A New Spiritual Awakening*, says, "It strikes me as interesting that those who followed the teaching of the new reform movement did not come to be known as 'Reformists', rather the moniker that stuck was 'Protestant.' Luther and his associates were protesters rather than reformers — they stood up against the religious conventions of the day, arguing on behalf of those suffering under religious, social, and economic oppression. These religious protesters accused the church of their day of being too rich, too political, in thrall to kings and princes, having sold its soul to the powerful. The original Protestants preached, taught, and argued for freedom — spiritual, economic, and political — and for God's justice to be embodied in the church and the world. It is time to put the protest back in Protestantism."

"The heart of Protestantism is the courage to challenge injustice and to give voice to those who have no voice. Protestantism opened access for all people to experience God's grace and God's bounty, not only spiritually but actually."

Today's reading, Isaiah 25:6-8, is the text that comes from the lectionary for All Saints' Day on November 1st, and yet I find it is also very appropriate for thinking about what it means that we are people who are called to protest in faith and give voice to those who have no voice. "On this mountain God will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all

peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of God's people God will take away from all the earth, for God has spoken."

This reading, Isaiah 25, is the hymn of thanksgiving that describes a very lofty banquet hosted by God. It gives thanks for God's deliverance from tyrants. Refuge from ongoing tyranny. Also, God prepares this banquet not only for the leaders, not only for the chosen people, but for "all peoples" and "all nations" - - the word "all" occurs five times in three verses in today's reading. God plans and serves the menu, described as very rich food and wine: choice wines, strained clear; sumptuous meats. Food is rarely described at length in scripture; in fact, in prophetic books, descriptions of foods and banquets often accompany criticism of debauchery. But here food, drink, and delight return on God's terms, not as an occasion for social oppression, but in a spirit of celebration and harmony hosted by the one who created all foods. Mourning clothes are no longer needed, since the people are comforted. As they eat, God "swallows" the shrouds, the death veils, that perpetuate division, isolation, discrimination and exclusion in the people's lives and in the world. More powerful than the most persistent foe, God wipes tears from all faces, becomes the refuge for all who escape from tyrants, and serves them in God's banquet with rich food. Isaiah 25 is, ultimately, the hymn of its dream of justice and peace. We are called to embrace these dreams and seek their fulfilment.

"The heart of Protestantism is the courage to challenge injustice and to give voice to those who have no voice. Protestantism opened access for all people to experience God's grace and bounty not only spiritually but actually. The early Protestants believed that they were not only creating a new church, but they were creating a new world, one that would resemble more fully God's desire for humanity. The original Protestant impulse was to resist powers of worldly dominion and domination in favor of the power of God's spirit to transform human hearts and society. Protestants were not content with the status quo. They felt a deep discomfort within. They knew things were not right. And they set out to change the world." (Diana Butler Bass)

At this point, I would like to share a story from the book I recently resumed reading, Cherie Dimanline's *The Marrow Thieves*. It may not immediately sound like it is related to our reflection on Protestantism and its meaning for us in the 21st century. And it may even be risky to use the story, especially when, in its history, Protestantism has been involved in colonialism and Residential Schools just as Catholicism has been. Personally, I have been thinking the brilliant imagination in *The Marrow Thieves* which teaches us how we might humbly acknowledge where we find the courage to "protest in faith and give voice to those who have no voice."

This award-winning Metis author Cherie Dimaline builds *The Marrow Thieves* story in a world nearly destroyed by global warming. The Indigenous people of North America are being hunted for their bone marrow, because it carries the key to recovering something the rest of the population has lost.

I am a very slower reader, and am only at page 41 out of 234 pages. But here are some beautifully written, important pieces I noted in it. On page 18. The second chapter, *The Fire*.

“Miig explained it one night at the fire.

‘Dreams get caught in the webs woven in your bones.

That’s where they live, in that marrow there.’

He poked at the crackling wood with a pointy stick till the shadows were frenetic against his tan face, ...

... I imagined spiderwebs in my bones and turned my palm towards the moon, watching the ballet of bones between my elbow and wrist twist to make it so. I saw webs clotted with dreams like fat flies. I wondered if the horses I’d ridden into this dawn were still caught in there like bugs, whinnying at the shift.

‘How do they get in there?’ RiRi, now seven, was always curious and not shy with her questions. ‘You are born with them. Your DNA weaves them into the marrow like spinners.’

In this story, the rest of the population has lost the ability to dream -- the ability to dream that gets caught in the webs woven in one’s bones.

How are you dreaming?

For what are you dreaming?

Do you echo the dreams of the early Protestants? Do you imagine and hope, in your bones and heart, brain and muscles, what was at the heart of Protestantism — the courage to protest, to challenge injustice, to give voice to those who have no voice and for all people to experience God’s grace and God’s bounty? And to do so, not only spiritually but actually?

Hymn: VU 713 **I See A New Heaven**

Offering Prayer:

God has given us everything we need: this earth to live upon and the food we need. As if that were not enough, God has also given us the Holy Spirit, and all of the spiritual gifts we need.

In a spirit of gratitude and humility, let us offer our gifts back to God.

For what we receive, make us truly thankful, O God.

For what we are about to give, make us thankful, too.

**Grateful for all that we are and for all that we might become,
we commit to living thankful, thanks-filled lives. God of All! Amen.**

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

Prayers of the People:

God of the past, full of memories.

God of the future, full of possibility.

And now is the time for truth and hope,

For accepting, changing, restoring, understanding.

Loving God, be with us this week especially when we think about the saints in our lives and the blessings we have received from them. If there has been hurt, transform them into hope. For the wrongs being done and their marks been deep, help us to reconnect to our body which stores the hurts in it, and let our whole being dream.

How are we dreaming?

For what are we dreaming?

The courage to protest,

To challenge injustice,

To give voice to those who have no voice

For all people to experience God's grace and God's bounty.

And to do so, not only spiritually but also actually?

We thank you, Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Equip us to continue in the work of the saints, until the day when we may be added to their number - - like the stars and planets brilliant and shining, caught in the night sky, myriads and myriads. Amen.

Commissioning and Benediction:

May we leave this place, conscious of our heritage of faith.

All good things are from God.

As we leave this place, may we remember God's blessings to us.

We are children of the living God.

As we go into the world, let us carry that blessing to others.

Amen.

Hymn: MV 216 *Wherever You May Go*