

Immanuel United Church
The Sixth Sunday of Epiphany
Feb 13th, 2022

Welcome

Hi everyone! On this Sunday of Epiphany, today, we continue to explore the gift of Epiphany. Also, our Stewardship Campaign and stories continue too. Epiphany marks the Nativity story of three wise ones following an unusual star until it stopped over the place where the baby Jesus was. "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy."

In this season of Epiphany, each Sunday service has been created with the use of the United Church stewardship service resource, "Discover Your Gifts — Share Your Gifts (Five Sundays in Epiphany)" (https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2021-10/ctb-2022_discover-gifts-share-gifts.docx) to help our community of faith take a closer look at what a variety of texts have to say about gifts that are revealed to us — what it means to share those gifts as a fundamental part of discipleship.

These worship resources were collaboratively prepared by: Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in the Atlantic Regions (who lives in Riverview, New Brunswick); Evan Δ∩^α Smith, Toronto Urban Native Ministry, Shining Waters Region; Ian March-MacCuish, First United Church, Mount Pearl, NL, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region; and Matthew Fillier, Lead Minister of Bedford United Church, Bedford, NS, Region 15.

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Discover your gifts. Share your gifts. It's what disciples of Jesus do.

Greeting:

God is here
all the time.
All the time
God is here.

All are welcome
all the time.
All the time
all are welcome.

Call to Worship:

To God,
I will sing.
Passionately. Free.

I will sing.
For You, Spirit, are here. All the time.

I will sing.
As time flows in the endless cycle of the cosmos,
as this morning's dawn rakes across the horizon of deep darkness,

I will sing.
As the green blade rises from the root of all life,
as life emerges from the dark mystery of Mother's womb,

I will sing.
As I try to hold onto you, you dance well beyond my reach.
As I call, your name answers from the foundation of my being.

I will sing. From my whole heart I will sing your praise,
for we are the work of your hands.

Let us worship.

Opening Prayer

Holy One and One in Many, the chickadee sings and the chickadee knows you,
in whose glory life is bestowed.

Spirit God, the gale wind unsettles and the gale wind knows you,
in whose breath life is bestowed.

Living God, the mustard seed sprouts and the mustard seed knows you,
in whose kin-dom life is bestowed.

**Enduring God, the oak tree rises, the oak tree knows you,
in whose care life is bestowed.**

God with us, the children see and the children know you,
in whose mystery life is bestowed.

**In the works of our hands, may we also show that
written on our hearts,
your name lives and your name grows.
May it be so. Amen.**

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

We light this candle, honouring the One who said "I am the Light."

Hymn: VU 374 Come and Find the Quiet Centre

Intergenerational Time: Open Epiphany Box!

<https://youtu.be/pxHblQI7HxE>

Scripture: Luke 6:17-26

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.

They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man (Human One).

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets."

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry."

"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep."

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

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

Reflection: Blessed Ones, Rejoice.

What can we infer from today's reading, the sermon on the Mount? It is a level place. No one is higher or lower in standing. It is the great crowd among which Jesus stands. They are a "great crowd" of his disciples (which means, not just the twelve), and a "great multitude of people who came from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon." Like the truckers, or the "Freedom Convoy", who travelled across Canada for several days before arriving in the capital city of Ottawa, these people came from far, through the region of Judea, to gather around Jesus. However, I assume that the energies of the congregated people (those on the meadow and the ones on the highways) could quickly be seen to be distinctively different.

First of all, today's Gospel says that people have come to "hear" Jesus. The multitude of people. The great crowd have come to "hear" the human one. I imagine that if just a few of them began to talk, it could snowball and others would also start talking and raising their voices so that they would ultimately disrupt or become a barrier to the rest of the crowd to be able to focus on, hear and understand Jesus. However, today's Gospel shows that the great crowd respects each other's intention to hear Jesus. They share an understanding and connection as a community to be comforted and to be challenged by the Word / voice of God, which is often communicated to human ones, children of God, in a spirit of gentleness. It's like a chickadee's song heard when a winter day suddenly gets slightly warmer. In the morning, when it is still cold outside, we might never try opening the window. Yet if our physical space, and our mind, is quiet enough, we can be fortunate to hear the cheerful high tones coming through the closed windows. We

need to be very quiet, with the intention of patiently contemplating the joy of silence, so that we can continue to enjoy the song of chickadees before they leave. I have also observed that I hear beautiful wisdom from someone who takes time to listen before speaking and then slowly speaks the words of importance.

Today's Gospel reading also shows another aspect of how the crowd gathered around Jesus that day. We soon discover that these people are not just quiet folks. They are not like the audience waiting quietly, holding their breath, in a concert hall, when the light is dimming, the curtain is opening, and the orchestra is ready to perform. These people are anxious. They are dreading. They are tired. They grieve. They are upset. They travelled from far and came because they needed a change in themselves, and their world. They wanted to be healed. The Gospel writer says that "they had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases." Some were "troubled with unclean spirits." "And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from Jesus and healed all of them."

The great crowd in today's reading were not those who were able to entertain the luxury of safety, stability, status quo during the period of time when Israel was tramped under the boots of Roman Empire. They were ordinary people who were abused by the power of their own royal and religious authorities, they were economically unstable and experienced other kinds of crisis which could deeply swamp their lives. These people were those who would be most affected by, and vulnerable to, the whims of the policy changes and politics. They were the poor, they were the ones who were hungry, those who were often hated, disrespected and excluded, reviled and defamed. It is hard to "stay calm" when one goes through unexpected, unwanted, unpredictable fluctuations of life's changes and merciless treatment. These people are those who could be "sinned against" more than "sinning", even though most of us are rarely always sinning or sinned against all the time. Like many, most, or all of us, these people are those who weep now; feel troubled today; are, hungry for acceptance, community and love; and are anxious for healing. And yet they have come together to hear the Holy One, the Gentle Word, the wisdom of Jesus, *logos*, *Sophia*, and to be with each other, for listening, receiving, sharing grace. And for healing, if this means that the freedom of being healed, uplifted, affirmed, acknowledged has room for everyone. The intention to come to hear the voice of the Holy One, the quiet and gentle one, the meek one, is what makes this quantitatively great crowd in today's reading truly, qualitatively GREAT! This great crowd inspires us to reflect on why we, Immanuel, are here to gather and worship today. The reason we are here today is because we have become a community of faith and continue our journey together with humility, creativity and courage, and we come to hear the holy one, who is One in Many, and Many in One, among us, beyond us, and in this moment in which we breathe, within us. We are never in a vacant state of

troubles, hurts, sorrows, needs, weeps, hopes, but Jesus calls each and every one of us, "Blessed". And in a voice that is softer than a whisper, higher than the chickadee's song, Jesus speaks to us,

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Human One.

Blessed ones, my friends, my lovers, "Rejoice and leap for joy.""

Jesus does not set up a division to call/tell who is essentially in and who is essentially out of his love, because of our choices, our behaviours, our beliefs, divided by who honks and who whispers. The most important truth that I find in today's Gospel reading is that the essential ingredient that creates a community that is one of faith is that we gather to *hear* the Holy One's voice, who blesses, who comforts, who empowers, who gives life, and who does so with the special preference of Good News, to the poor. Ultimately, the last of the four blessings/beatitudes of today's Gospel is that Jesus urges us to *rejoice*. "For yours is the kingdom of God", rejoice. "For you will be filled", rejoice. "For you will laugh," rejoice. For you will find the true peace of acceptance in the radical/radiant love of God, rejoice, the Blessed ones, rejoice. Leap for joy, in the quiet centre of God.

Hymn: VU 578 As a Fire Is Meant for Burning

Stewardship Story: Mission and Service

I believe with all my heart that here at Immanuel we can make a positive impact in the world! One of the ways we can do that is through Mission and Service!

By giving to Mission & Service, the people of the United Church join together to accomplish three goals: to transform and save lives, to inspire meaning and purpose, and to build a better world. Your gifts to Mission & Service help people in need in Canada and around the world by providing access to food, housing, and employment support. Your generosity helps people develop new skills and access life-changing medical treatment and counselling. Your gifts help people

live meaningfully and purposefully by supporting education opportunities, communities of faith, retreat centres, and more.

Additionally, when the worst disasters threaten the most vulnerable, you can help. Through special emergency response appeals, your gifts make an immediate life-saving difference. With the guidance of our partners on the ground, we are able to respond quickly to crises around the world, helping our partners bring food, shelter, health, and sanitation to people who have lost so much.

There is also an online catalogue where you can choose gifts to meet the world's need. The gifts in the catalogue are Mission & Service projects that would not happen without your generosity. There are gift ideas to suit every interest, budget, and person. By giving a Gift with Vision, you can care for the planet; ensure those who are hungry have a hot, nutritious meal; or support an economic development initiative. A year-round opportunity to give a meaningful gift, Gifts with Vision ensures that your gift reflects your values.

Making a commitment to both Immanuel and Mission & Service is part of our Stewardship journey.

Thanks to all who continue to support our Mission and Service fund!

Respectfully,

Judy Gierys, Mission & Service Enthusiast

Offering Invitation:

Just as the psalmist sang thanksgiving to God from their whole heart, we are also asked to offer all that we are for the work of Christ in our world. Whoever we are, we all have been blessed by God, and God calls upon each of us to share our blessings. In the sharing of our gifts, God rejoices as we fulfill our purpose in Christ—to love one another, as in turn we are loved with God's whole heart. Now is the time to fulfill that purpose. Let us give boldly. Let us give together. Let us give thanks to the One whose love endures forever.

The fourth Mission & Service video

MV 191 *What Can I Do?*

**What can I do? What can I bring?
What can I say? What can I sing?
I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.**

(followed by)

MV 196 *We Will Take What You Offer*

**We will take what you offer, we will live by your word;
We will love one another and be fed by you, God. (X2)**

Prayer:

**You are the Source of everything we have, all that we are,
and all that we will become.
We offer everything we have received to you,
in praise and thanksgiving.
Giving for the sake of our human siblings,
our planet, and our future, we make our offering.
Now take all that we offer, God,
and bless and yield these gifts a hundredfold,
that when the voice of your people cries out,
the call to be church would be our answer.
In Jesus' name, we ask it. Amen.**

Prayers of the People:

God.

It would be so much easier if you fit neatly into the boxes we make,
where we could catch just a glimpse of you when it's convenient,
but always safely tuck you away for later,
when we decide if we are ready to wrestle with what you put before us.
It would be so much easier, if you were tame, well behaved, transactional.
That we know. That we understand. That has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
But you're not like that. Thank you, God—that you're not like that.
Just when we think we can pin you down,
you flip tables on us again, and again, and again.
You arc across time and space,
eternity unbound in galaxies that spur
the seeds of stars that yield life on a scale the human mind cannot begin to fathom.
We are just a speck of dust on this third rock from the sun.

And yet. And yet into this speck of dust, you breathed yourself.

Your Spirit.

What are we to make of you, you who are beyond our imagination, and as close as our very next breath?

What are we, to be loved by the likes of you?

Even the hard-hearted and self-assured, you love.

Even when I walk in the midst of trouble,

even as my enemies of self-doubt, judgment, and despair haunt my trail,

you preserve me. You stretch out your hand with grace and mercy,

lifting me up, renewing my spirit, reminding me—that I was created with the purpose of your love and justice.

When I was in the grind of the frontline day and night—I called, and you were with me.

When I was in the midst of chemo and radiation—I called, and you were with me.

When I was confronted with loss—I called, and you were with me.

When I needed a community to belong to—I called, and you were with me.

When I was lost and tossed upon the sea of no care—I called, and you were with me.

When I was sure I had come to the end of my limit—I called, and you were with me,

not always in how I imagine or would conceive,

but always born in the still, small presence at the root of my being,

who is louder than all the thunder under heaven.

So I will give you thanks, God of Holy Mystery.

I will praise you with my whole heart song,

for you alone are worthy of this.

All life is the work of your hands,

and this, you will not forsake.

Hymn: MV 212 Sent Out in Jesus' Name

Commissioning:

Rise. Rise in the glory of the One who calls you and I to be church,

to be the living echo of the first Word,

to be enduring love made flesh,

to be committed with our whole heart, a living testament of generous love and justice

come on earth.

In the works of our hands,

in the song that fills our lungs,

In the praise that carries us home, rise!

We rise in the glory of the one who calls us to be the church. Amen.

Benediction:

**May the Creator uphold you.
May the Redeemer restore you.
May the Sustainer release you.
And through this blessed grace,
may you share the Good News of life,
poured out for everyone and everything,
Everywhere.
Amen.**