

Immanuel United Church  
The Fifth Sunday of Epiphany  
Feb 6th, 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."

The next two Epiphany services at Immanuel, including today's, have 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](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 ∂∏<sup>o</sup> 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.

Call to Worship:

Listen—Do you hear the voice of the Holy One?

**Inviting, daring, challenging, celebrating, creating—you and me.**

I form you.

**I know you.**

I consecrate you.

**I appoint you.**

I send you.

**Fear no one. I am with you.**

I will deliver you.

**I have put my words in your mouth.**

God, may we have ears to hear and voices to speak this truth.

**Let us worship.**

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

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

Hymn: VU 94   Lovely Star in the Sky

<https://youtu.be/phmGTPdkX9c>

Scripture: Luke 4:21–30

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Choir Anthem: Brother James Air (23rd Psalm)

Reflection: God's Wordle

Have you seen the online game, 'Wordle'? It has recently become very popular. You may have noticed friends talking about the 'word of the day', or posting cryptic grids of coloured boxes on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Have you, perhaps, joined this trend? (Show many images.)

Wordle challenges players to deduce a five-letter word in six guesses. A new puzzle is published every day and players can post how quickly they solved the colourful grid on social media - - but in a way that does not spoil the answer for those still playing. Wordle was put online in October, gained popularity over the next two months, and is now played by millions of people every day.

I remained uninterested in the game even as my Facebook friends began to post their results every day, writing, "Humble-brag, whew!" or, "It's ridiculously satisfying, First time trying the #Wordle craze, fun! First time to get it in two tries!!" until, last week, my 15-year-old son, Peace, joined the club and urged me to try it.

You may wonder how it works. The game can be played in just a few minutes. Players begin by guessing any five-letter word. If any of the letters are in that day's word but in the wrong place, they turn gold. If they are in the word in the right place, they turn green. If they are not in the word, they turn grey.

Initially, engineer Josh Wardle devised the game during lockdown for just two people - himself and his partner. The inventor said, "It has been incredible to watch the game bring so much joy to so many and I feel so grateful for the personal stories some of you have shared with me - - from Wordle uniting distant family members, to provoking friendly rivalries, to supporting medical recoveries." Wardle's game definitely worked for me and Peace - - building a bond of rivalry between a mother and her son!

The reason why I share this Wordle story in today's reflection is because I am inviting us to look at today's Gospel story as a game. Wordle is not about testing how big your English vocabulary is. It is more about how quickly and efficiently you can make logical "deductions" from the set of vowels and consonants. Each group has a restricted number of letters without repetition. For example, if, after two turns, you see that M, S, and T are in the wrong places but I *is* in the right place, and E is not in the word, how many deductions must you make to get to the right answer? The word can't be TIMES, but MISTY should work!

Let's talk more about "deductions." Recently, I was introduced to a Logic Game that is part of the test for the Law School Admissions Test (called the LSAT). Like solving Wordle questions, in order to "attack" Logical Games which look like this one (showing the image on the screen) deductions are very useful. "A restaurant must choose its main dinner entree for each night of one week, beginning on Sunday and ending on Saturday. The possible entrees are beef, lamb, manicotti, pork, spaghetti, trout, and veal, each of which will be used on a different night. The following conditions must be met when determining the menu:" (The image on the screen shows the four conditions.) Then, the first question is "Which one of the following is a possible menu in order from Sunday to Saturday?" It's a difficult problem, but there are many harder Logical Game questions in the world.

Now, what I would like to highlight for today's reflection is one of the LSAT textbook writers' instructions I found on-line. I find it interesting because it is so relevant to the ways we can read Gospel stories and reflect on Jesus' words and actions. It's a way to explore and develop skills to be good at God's Logic Games, God's Wordle.

For example, students can encounter a difficult, complicated Logic Game question in which the question writer put in many logical wrinkles. The problem-solvers can be stunned and shocked by the seeming complexity, and just stare at the game, not knowing where to start. The instructor says: "Don't panic! Some of the new LSAT questions may look different from the games you have practiced on. Once you understand how games work and can recognize the structures the test writers use to build them, you can see how consistent they really are. Just stay calm and take a step back to evaluate the information. The details will change, but the basic ingredients won't! Focus on the big picture. Focus on the similarities to other games you've already done. Don't simply stare at a game that seems confusing. Focus on the underlying similarities to games you've already seen and get to work applying the process.

Let me repeat the last sentence: **"Don't simply stare at a game that seems confusing. Focus on the underlying similarities to games you've already seen and get to work applying the process."** Just like in our own lives, analogous to challenging Wordle or LSAT Logical Game questions, in Gospel stories, Jesus' words and actions can seem very confusing and complicated. If we only focus on how a new challenge looks, its differences from what we have known, we could lose confidence, look for guidance from outside rather than the wisdom within. We might even try to avoid that challenge altogether. A better strategy is, rather than being frightened by the difference, we try focusing on the deeper similarities and elements/conditions that are consistent to what we have known and which we have worked through. We know which "deductions" worked, or didn't work. If we were not able to figure them out in the past, now is the

time to explore the possibilities, especially to find which conditions, or elements, have hindered us from experiencing wholeness, success or joy.

Today's Gospel tells the story about Jesus, acting like a Logic Game instructor. As soon as he preaches in the synagogue in his hometown, citing Isaiah, speaking of bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, and letting the oppressed go free, the majority of the congregation praises his clarity and gracious words. However, there are also those who murmur amongst themselves and ask each other, suspiciously, "Is not this Joseph's son?" .

On hearing this, Jesus outlines what the Good News can mean to the poor. Jesus says to them, "You might think that you are the insiders of God's grace, the direct recipients of God's Word, and that you are not a Syrian or a widow who you believe are out of reach of God's favour."

Then, Jesus, like a Logic Game instructor, provokes people to remember, which means to "make deductions" to understand God's logic, God's law, the *Logos*, the *Sophia*, the principle of how God has intended to create the world, to create us, as a community of the faithful. Jesus reminds the congregation of what their ancestors explored, solved, and recorded in the scripture. In the time of Elijah, there was a three-and-a-half-year long famine that made the entire country starve. God sent Elijah, the prophet, only to a widow in Sidon, while none of those who believed they were the true insiders of God's favour received God's grace. Jesus adds that also, in the time of Elisha, God sent Elisha, only to a foreigner, Naaman, the Syrian, when there were many inside the Jewish cohort who needed the same cure. Jesus presented these two clues to show how God's Logic Game works. God's love and Word knows no restriction and is not constrained by the logic of exclusivity that is focused on defining who is in and who is out. In God's Logic Game, the deductions we must remember to factor into our lives are the stories that tell us God's love gives preference to the poor. This preference of God's good news is profoundly countercultural, creating life-giving and life-sharing challenges to the logic of power and privilege in the world.

If church is like school, a learning community of disciples of Jesus, we certainly have learned, explored and practiced God's favourite logic: "The last will be the first, and the first will be last... The Kingdom of Heaven is among you." Then Jesus told his disciples, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." These are great conditional logics (i.e. 1) If last, then, First (L -> F) and if first, then last (F -> L); 2) If the Kingdom, then, Kingdom is always among you. (K -> KY); etc, etc), daring us to study, practice, and share God's *logos*, *sophia*, widely.

The last tip from the online LSAT instructor is this: Don't just stare at the game, even if it looks difficult. **Keep your pencil moving.** Focus on the underlying similarities to games you've already seen and get to work applying the process. The clues and deductions to explore God's logic games, God's Wordle, in our own lives, in church outreach, in politics, in society, have already been presented to us. We may add more along the way, and need to be flexible and still be very creative, but God's *logos, sophia* is our guide. Focus on the similarities (Gospel/life), and keep our faith/pencil moving.

Hymn: VU 87 *I Am the Light of the World*

#### Stewardship Story: Caring for Our Faith Community

As the Guiding Elders for the Caring for our Faith Community cluster, we would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who has been involved in this ministry. If you have participated in an ongoing, time consuming responsibility or one that is short term in caring for one another and our building and property, thank you.

Life and work over the last two years at Immanuel has changed with the pandemic. Remember when we greeted one another at coffee time or other gatherings? The phone tree callers and those of you keeping in touch with one another has helped give us the sense of community and connection. Ha Na's pastoral care is primarily by telephone.

We've missed celebrating the lives of some of our beloved folks. The Funeral and Memorial Committee has continued to be a resource to families. Prior to the recent increased restrictions created by the Omicron variant, a Memorial Service was held (in adherence with the Public Health Protocol) for Bill Burr.

The building has been carefully maintained by faithful volunteers. As of January 8th, 2022, a newly hired caretaker has officially begun his duties. We welcome Glen McIvor to our Immanuel staff and wish him well in his new position.

#### Offering Invitation:

Our offerings of time, talent, and money will gratefully be received. Now is the opportunity to share your gifts to further the work of Immanuel United Church and the Spirit's task.

The third Mission & Service video:

**The incredible difference your gifts make: Bill's Story** <https://youtu.be/Cs-JTMFt5TE>

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:

**May what we have offered here be true, be blessed, and be sent into our  
world by the Spirit of the One who, even now, is with us. Always.  
Amen.**

Communion:

God be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Giver.**

Let us give thanks to our Lover.

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

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you,  
creator of heaven and earth.

**You took the dust of the earth and breathed your life into it,  
making humankind in your image.**

Because of this act of creation and your breath that lives in our spirits,  
**everyone is of sacred worth.**

Yet, from the very beginning of time, we have sought to tarnish that image.  
We have not seen each other with your eyes. We have not loved each other with your heart. When we have treated your sacred creation as unworthy, we not only severed our relationship with them, but also with you. Yet, you continued to be faithful in loving us. Faithful in sending your prophets throughout the ages to call us to repentance and reflection.

**And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:**

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

You sent Jesus to teach us to love you with all we have and all we are,  
not just giving you a portion of our hearts,

**but instead inviting you to come in and completely transform us.**

When we continued to harm one another, out of a desire to make ourselves appear more righteous,

**you sent us Jesus to teach us to sit and break bread together  
and love our neighbors as ourselves.**

And when we continued to choose fear instead of faith, hatred instead of love,

Jesus went to the cross to show us what love ultimately looks like,

**laying down your life for even those who do not love you in return.**

On this day, we remember this gift of transforming love

as we share together in this holy meal and tell its story anew -

**that on that night long ago, when Jesus gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:**

**“Take and eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”**

**When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:**

**“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

And so, in remembrance of these, we come together as your people, your church, and share our very selves, praise in thanksgiving, and proclaim the mystery of faith:  
**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us anew this day, and on the bread and the cup.  
May they stand as tangible symbols for us of the love and new life you offer to us as you call us to a life of radical grace.

**Bind us together, Loving Creator, not despite our differences but through them, as you weave us together as the beautiful body of Christ.**

May we joyfully serve beside our brothers and sisters  
in a way that reclaims the sacred worth and the breath of God that resides in us,  
until Christ comes in boundary-dissolving love,  
and we feast all together at that banquet of greater inclusion.  
**Amen.**

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

Commissioning:

Here is the place.

**Now is the time.**

God calls.

**We answer.**

Let us go and answer as church,  
as people sent to root up injustice  
and to plant the seeds of peace,  
that together with the Spirit, we would renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Benediction:

Bless the Giver

**and every good gift!**

Bless all that has been planted,

**that it will sprout in us and in others.**

Bless the harvest of life

**that we are called to share.**

In our words, in our actions, in our time, talents, and treasure

**may the Spirit in me honour the Spirit in you.**