

Immanuel United Church
Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 8th, 2022

Welcome

On this Sunday, we celebrate relationships: mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, and all those of every gender who nurture us. Our God is a God of relationship who seeks us out and longs for us to connect with others and with all creation. Let us gather in the light of Christ to celebrate all of the loving relationships that shape and bless our lives.

Call to Worship:

From the dust of the earth, the Holy One breathed us into life.

Through the breath of God we are all connected.

Shaped in her image, God formed us with a purpose:

To create

To serve

To tend

To protect (or protest)

To love

That life may flourish in all its forms,

May the Spirit of the Living God be manifest in us!

Prayer:

**We come as one family: seeking your presence, celebrating our faith,
supporting one another, walking together through change.**

**Be with us all today, especially those who mourn the passing of someone
or something that has been so important.**

Make us all aware of your never-ending love and care. Amen.

Hymn: VU 644 *I Was There To Hear Your Borne Cry*

Scripture: John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do

not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.'

The Choir Anthem: *Our God is an Awesome God*

Reflection: Voice ID and Mother Earth

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

It's been about four years since I was called to serve on the General Council Executive of the United Church of Canada. As a group, we only had a few meetings in person before the pandemic halted us. Then, we continued our meetings and tasks via zoom and emails. In those first few in-person gatherings, there was a very kind person, Tim, who, I later learned, uses *they* as their pronoun. They would come to me and affirm what I just shared in the meeting and the importance of my unique perspective. What Tim showed me was that they *hear* my voice, not just my vocal tone, my decibel level, or my accent – my vocal ID. Tim hears my perspective, the weight of my experience, the way my singular past informs my present words.

Then, a month ago, the group received an email from Tim, saying that they would need some time away; they were then just forty-eight hours past emergency surgery, and the surgeon expected it to be cancerous. They would focus on recovery and the unknown time needed for chemotherapy. Reading Tim's message with a heavy, sad heart, I did not know what to say, how to respond — across the distance of geography and the pandemic's confusing ways to measure how we are connected. Would an email be enough to convey all that I was feeling? But then, Tim came back to the meeting a week ago. They looked thinner, but they still had that beautiful, wholesome demeanour. When the moderator asked us to share some words as a gift for one another. Tim said, "All of a sudden, the New Creed sounds so different. Until I emailed folks to tell them about my surgery, I didn't know how many places and people I had made my commitment to." Tim's eyes were on us. Zoom, even if it might never be close to an in-person connection, still conveys such profound moment of appreciation, the heart-to-heart river of words, silence, space, emotions.

Until that moment, hearing the words of gift each person shared, especially until Tim's voice, I realized that I had not paid deep attention to the New Creed against the background picture of my life. How could a familiar song be heard so differently? I have been thinking a lot, since, and wondered if the words of affirmation of God's love can help each of us to respect the presence of the other's voice, remain with their silence, be moved by their words, and hear the voice of the Risen One in their heart. Here is the New Creed, and let us hear the space these words create...

We are not alone,
we live in God's world.
We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

Note: A New Creed is a brief and well-loved affirmation of faith used widely in our worship (1968; rev. 1980, 1995).

In today's Gospel, Jesus says his disciples hear his voice. Here, his voice doesn't just mean Jesus' physical vocal tone, his voice's decibel range or even accent. If that were all, we, who have never met Jesus in person, could not possibly know or recognize his voice. For a long time, Jesus' words 'hear my voice', made me think that he is talking about his vocal ID. Just like the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep: a particular person calls, whom the sheep know as the significant being that feeds and

takes care of them, and the sheep responds and follows. Even if the metaphor Jesus himself uses is just like that, I realize that only recognizing Voice ID is not enough.

These days, my 15-year-old son plays the piano. He loves it, but he struggles when the music is more complicated. (He started lessons in August, last year.) He asks me to come and help him when he wants to do better! He plays his favourite Japanese animation theme songs, which require higher skills sometimes and his fingers are not in order. After working with him several times, I could see what needs to happen: "Peace, you should first be able to hear the music in your head! You should have it all in your mind, and only when you can sing it, play it, hear it in your heart, then, relax, and put them to work with your hands! Don't try to play straight from the music sheet to your fingers." Likewise, if we want to hear Jesus's voice and follow the way, just recognizing the vocal tone cannot make us perfectly work, love, tend, protect, serve, create... We need to be able to learn the Risen One's song, hear the song, practice the song, hopefully and possibly, in its entirety. Then, hearing would be followed by our faith fingers 'following' in order/music. It could be a book study or Bible study, but also it can be reciting Jesus' Prayer, or the New Creed, played in a variety of our life's contexts...

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We can also hear the Risen One's song, its entirety, when we go out into the world. The Mother. Mother Earth. Last Wednesday, the bright beautiful sunshine falling all over our corner of the world (checking from the windows, I got so excited) was contrasted with the news and pictures I encountered with a heavy heart on social media, calling for prayers for the regions and residents that the floodwaters threatened. Walking on the Seine River trail that day, the visual signs of spring were undeniably late - about a month late? Or a few weeks? Last year, the wild plums blossomed on May 12th! (That's just 4 days away!) And yet, what tells me that the spring has come, the Risen One is undeniably here, is when I hear the voices of the little finches all over! When I went out, the small things with feathers, (exactly the size of my middle finger) flew like a butterfly, above the ground, beside the branches. Goldfinches' plumage shone like smooth fish skin, an unripened green mango colour. All of a sudden, just like my colleague Tim's words, I could hear the New Creed in these signs of migrant, transitioning hope, that sings, that flies, that "perches in the soul" (Emily Dickinson) exerting little busy movements. The entirety of everything was to me Mother Earth, which today we sing and celebrate on this Mother's Day. We live in God's world. We are not alone.

Would you like to hear the entire song of Hope by Emily Dickinson? I learned it from Jah-bi.

Hope

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

Hymn: MV 88 *Over My Head*

Prayers of the People:

VU 400 *Lord, Listen To Your Children Praying*

Gracious Jesus, as we gather,
let your presence be felt among us.
Let us be reminded of how you walked / journeyed alongside your friends,
risen yet alive.
Let us be reminded that you travel alongside us, and all living creatures,
each and every day, in all the circumstances of our lives.
May joy fill our hearts and our thoughts,
with the assurance you have risen and ascended,
and yet you are still here, loving, caring, and we are your witnesses.

Hundreds of people from Peguis First Nation are settling into hotels in Winnipeg, not knowing when they will see their homes again.

Loving God, help us make Mother's Day more meaningful.
Help us make it a time of generosity through our Mission & Service that helps change the lives of families at home and around the world.
Help us make it even more of a celebration of those extraordinary people in our lives we call mom, who are like mothers to us, and to people of all genders, as well as trans and non-binary persons who offer mothering care.
Help us make it more supportive of mothers who have lost children, children who have lost mothers, women who long to be mothers, and those who choose not to be mothers.
Help us make it more open to those who don't fit the traditional model of family and feel left out during this holiday.
Help us make it more caring of single moms, new moms, and those looking after their moms during the pandemic without the social supports that are usually in place.
Help us make it more aware of those whose mothering responsibilities stretch across decades to span a lifetime.
Help us make it more loving for those who want to draw closer to their mother and more healing for those who need to keep a distance.
Help us make Mother's Day more, O God.
More generous...more open...more caring.
We pray this in your holy name.
Amen.

Hymn: VU 420 *Go to the World*

Commissioning and Benediction:

**We remember those who have shown us the way
and invited us to live as part of the family of God.**

**We depart to share the breath of God in the world
and to live with the hope that we cherish as part of the family of God.**

Amen