

Immanuel United Church  
September 18, 2022

Welcome

Call to Worship:

God has given us this beautiful earth, all that grows,  
all that lives upon it.

**Thanks be to God.**

God has given us breath to live and spirit to sing.

**Thanks be to God.**

God has gathered us into a community of care and worship.

**Let us worship God with love, thanksgiving and praise.**

Hymn: VU p.835 Psalm 113 ***Praise to the Lord***

Prayer of Approach:

**In joy and in trouble,  
Help us, gracious God,  
To trust your love,  
To serve your purpose,  
And to praise your name.  
Amen.**

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:1-7  
Luke 16: 1-13

Choir Anthem: ***Here I Am Lord***

Reflection

### **Reclaiming Christian Identity as Stewards of Creation**

Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female astronaut was recently interviewed on CBC and asked what she hoped her legacy would be. She replied: I hope people will "remember me for moving the bar for humankind to a higher ethic in relationship to our beautiful earth". Her higher ethic sums up lessons from today's scripture readings.

My message this morning builds on her goal for humanity to improve our relationship to our earth, God's creation.

### **What can each human do to live with higher ethics in relationship to Creation and our beautiful earth?**

Our new Moderator, The Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne identifies three areas that reinforce Ms Bondar's goal: Climate, Equality and the need for Reconciliation. She notes that all three

concerns are tied to our current economic system that is not functioning to support LIFE, the earth or humanity.

Today's scripture readings summarize our dilemma. Faithful people choose their primary relationship to be with God. They learn to live by receiving God's love and giving their love back to God/self/and others, to expand their quality of life with reciprocal relationships. The healthier our relationships, the more love, trust and energy we can co-create with our partners, children, families and communities. Luke says it simply: Humans cannot serve two masters: God and wealth.

Yet, in 2022, humanity's relationship to God has diminished and been steadily silenced with over 500 years of elevating wealth as more important. The earth and many life species face extinction today because global systems were designed to benefit small wealthy groups who were legally allowed to exploit, profit and hoard resources, particularly disadvantaging black, brown or coloured peoples and now, life itself.... Our Creator must weep.. LIFE is intended to be so much more than this!

### **So what is humanity doing to course correct?**

Today, all doctrines of superiority, including the Doctrine of Discovery, are illegal in international and domestic law. In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples outlined a framework for equity-based repair and right relationships. Canada's Truth & Reconciliation Commission used this framework for reconciliation in its 94 Calls to Action. In 2016, "An Ecumenical Statement on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #48" calling for a fundamental reordering of our relationship and a significant change in our identity as a country, was signed by The United Church of Canada with 6 other Christian denominations. (p.275 Honouring the Declaration: Church Commitments to Reconciliation and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2021).

The UCC has made apologies to Indigenous peoples in our church for its role in the country's assimilation project through church mission (1986) and for its role in running residential schools for the federal government (1998) (Honouring the Declaration: Church Commitments to Reconciliation and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, p.80). Indigenous communities received these apologies but did not accept them as they needed to see what the words meant in practice.

General Council 43 embraced 9 Calls to the Church from the Caretakers of Our Indigenous Circle. The UCC affirmed "Full Indigenous identity restoration would involve recognition of Indigenous claims to land, political structures, and the freedom to live as uniquely Indigenous nations". (p.79)

The most recent Broadview magazine reflects current ideas and actions informing our church reinforces this theme. The Oct/Nov issue includes an article titled "Christianity Revisited"(p.16-18). In it, social ethicist Miguel De La Torre invites Christians to reform current Christianity from being a system designed to "domesticate people, so that the privileged in structures of power remain privileged". He suggests that to be closer to Jesus' gospel message, Christians have to "be" more like Jesus, who was not white-skinned, privileged and stood with marginalized people witnessing to God's love for all...Privileged people, who have avoided hardships experienced by the marginalized, are due for relational upgrading.

General Council 44 approved a proposal brought forward by the National Indigenous Council to “remove structural barriers toward developing and sustaining an autonomous Indigenous Church” (Oct/Nov 2022 Broadview, p.56) within the wider church as well as continuing dialogue on right relations and reparations. The National Indigenous Council sees moving forward on this proposal shows the UCC is moving to walk its talk; keeping its commitment to the UNDeclaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and, charting a new way forward based on partnership.....

With the institutional church choosing to recognize its privilege and live into right relationships, how can individual members do the same? I offer one possibility. Be open to learn from indigenous people who have different experience from you.

I worked in an inner city outreach ministry when one day, an indigenous woman, an educator, asked me this question.. **“When did Christians quit respecting creation?”**..... I could not answer her. I had never considered that I, or Christians, didn’t respect Creation.

We both agreed that the earth provided food, clothes, housing and essential resources for life. **But, she lived with a deep personal connection of her life unfolding in relation and rhythm with the cycles and seasons of Mother Earth.** Her deep connection to her Creator, as Mother, reinforced her value, worth and essential contribution as a girl and eventually as a woman who could become a mother herself! I was curious how she learned this? This was totally different from the lack of facts of life education in my Christian family! In fact, there was so little discussion about what it meant to be a woman that my grandmother feared she was dying when her menses began. No one had talked about the normal transition to becoming an adult woman, as a positive part of life.

My Christian teachings taught girls and boys to respect God, the Father in Sunday School, but mostly omitted respect for God, as Mother. Waking up to this omission, my discomfort grew when I heard familiar hymns, prayers and scriptures using words affirming domination of the earth that I knew extended to exploit women and poor people. I knew Christians sometimes used these phrases to prove they were “right and good”. I could no longer enjoy singing/saying words reinforcing misperceptions of God’s love as a domination force against Creation, women, children or any life form without awareness of internal discomfort.

And, I gained a deep respect for the courageous faith of traditional indigenous leaders and indigenous Christians living into the wholeness of God as Creator, Father and Mother of all Creation. I was learning how intentional traditional sacred teachings prepared indigenous peoples to be stewards caring for themselves as part of the wonder of all creation. Healthy indigenous leaders already embody this higher ethic of reciprocal relationship to creation and are still waiting for Christians to embrace it... for over 500 years.

Wow! how humbling and hopeful! ... Blessed with sacred teachings from an indigenous woman, I expanded my Christian relationship to Creator God, as both Father and Mother. This boosted my hope and imagination for how much better Life will be when Christians and indigenous peoples are all stewards of Creation.

It seems to me the higher ethic Roberta Bodnar and Moderator Carmen Lansdowne are inviting us to shape has always been here... Mother Earth who cares for human beings invites all humanity to walk together with respect for Her. Indigenous peoples have been walking this path for thousands of years. It is the path Jesus walked. Living in relationship to the wholeness

of God includes being a steward of Creation and letting go delusions of wealth. Christians choosing this path will discover they are not alone.

Searching for an answer to the unsettling question “When did Christians quit respecting Creation?” I never really found it... but I did find indigenous leaders willing to help Christians learn “to live with respect in Creation” and walk their talk.

The words “to live with respect in Creation” was added to the New Creed when Rev. Stan McKay, the first indigenous moderator of UCC began reminding us in the UCC of our stewardship relationship with Creation as it informed how we cared for ourselves and each other.

Today, choosing to be a steward of Creation supports our new Moderator, Rev. Carmen Lansdowne to bring greater focus to address issues of Climate, Equality and Reconciliation that also keep raising the bar to Roberta Bodnar’s higher ethic of caring for the environment. This higher bar for Roberta is baseline for indigenous peoples. But, for Christians reclaiming identity as stewards of Creation it may be a return to God’s intended path, an expansion of domesticating Christianity from keeping privileged people in power and learning to walk with others to cocreate an equity-based path benefitting all to have a future.

It’s a new time. Let’s claim our full Christian identity as stewards of Creation. Let’s work in partnership with the National Indigenous Council to walk together on a new path of self-determination to reflect God’s love within The United Church of Canada. Let’s share the good news of what we have learned so far with our children/ grandchildren/ neighbours and friends. Let’s be open to learn from each other. And, let’s celebrate that “We are not alone” with every step forward. Thanks be to God.

A New Creed

Hymn: VU291      ***All Things Bright and Beautiful***

Offering VU540      ***Grant Us, God, the Grace***  
**Grant us, God, the grace of giving,**  
**with a spirit large and free,**  
**that ourselves and all our living**  
**we may offer faithfully.**

Offering Prayer

Prayers of the People

VU916      ***A Paraphrase of the Prayer of Jesus***

Hymn: VU307      ***Touch the Earth Lightly***

***Commissioning and Benediction:***

O God, the only source of life and energy and wealth,  
Make us better stewards and more careful tenants  
Of the world you lend us as our home.

Send us out filled with your love  
And the grace of Jesus the Christ.  
May the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.  
Today and every day.  
Amen.

*VU964 Go Now in Peace (x2)*

*Go now in peace, go now in peace.*

*May the love of God surround you everywhere,*

*Everywhere, you may go...*