

Immanuel United Church
August 14th, 2022

Welcome

Call to Worship from a Song of Faith

God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.

Yet, in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship.

So God creates the universe and with it
the possibility of being and relating.

**God tends the universe,
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.**

God enlivens the universe,
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.

**Grateful for God's loving action,
We cannot keep from singing.**

Hymn: VU 268 *Bring Many Names* verses 1-3

**Bring many names, beautiful and good,
celebrate, in parable and story,
holiness in glory, living, loving God.
Hail and hosanna! Bring many names!**

**Strong mother God, working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation,
setting each equation, genius at play:
Hail and hosanna, strong mother God!**

**Warm father God, hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living,
caring and forgiving till we're reconciled:
Hail and hosanna, warm father God!**

Prayer:

Gracious God, hear our silent prayers
as we confess those things that separate us
from you and from each other... (*silence*)

Words of Assurance (*sung*): VU 268 *Bring Many Names* verses 6

**Great, living God,
never fully known,
joyful darkness
far beyond our seeing,
closer yet than breathing,
everlasting home:
Hail and hosanna,
great, living God!**

Scripture reading: 1 John 4

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent God's only begotten Child into the world so that we might live through Christ.

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us of God's Spirit.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us.

Message: God's love is... 仁

The last chapter of the Bible ends with the splendid image of a river, the river of life. Revelation 22:1 "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb." In this imagery, the Lamb is the risen Jesus and the saints in light surround the Christ, gentle and soft.

In our own lives, too, from the beginning to the ending, since the immemorable Eternal, the river of life flows. It is endless, continuous, and nourishes everything its path touches.

I imagine, following the Buddhist images of 'relationships' or 'things', that even if the surface of the water looks calm, deep down, the flow can be turbulent. Likewise, even when the ocean seems churned with big waves, the depths can be peaceful. And yet, these opposite states of being can still be one and inseparable. It is because the nature, the ground of our being is whole and unified.

In our lives, some events are welcome and delightful, while others are difficult to accept. Some are deeply sad. Such events in our lives raise turbulent feelings and emotions. Confucianism, another major religious practice like Buddhism, notes that four primary emotions can arise in response to life's events: 喜怒哀樂 (joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure/happiness).

Confucianism began with the wisdom of Confucius, born five centuries before Christ. His conversations with his disciples were recorded in the Book of Analects after his death, (similar to how the Gospels were written) and, 219 years later, his conversations and observations started to be interpreted philosophically by scholars. These new interpreters agreed that joy, anger, sorrow and happiness arise because there is 'ren' (仁) in the foundation of human nature. (It might even be the foundation of the entire universe). 'Ren' is a big concept just like God's love. 'Ren' is pronounced the same as 'Ren (人)' meaning 'human' (人). The principal definition of Ren 仁 means 'benevolence'. It can also mean 'consideration, compassion, humanity, charity.' In another context 'ren' can 仁 also refer to one 'kernel' of grain. Therefore, it signifies that benevolence/or loving kindness is the kernel of human nature, things in the world, and of the universe. All together, 'ren' as 仁 means love, especially love as the foundation of human life, of the nature of things, of the universe.

The Confucian interpreters have taught their students that we feel human feelings and emotions and go through certain emotional states in life's events because, in our foundation, we love. We feel not only joy, pleasure and happiness, but also anger and sorrow, because the ground of these important human feelings is love. Because we are capable of loving, we expect to be loved. Because there is love, we feel.

Today's reading in 1 John teaches "We love because God first loved us." "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."

Because there is love, because love is the ground of everything and at the foundation of all events, we are joyful, we are affected by anger or sorrow, and our spirit is lifted with pleasure, peace, happiness. The love is 仁, the love of God, love as the foundation of all living and moving things in our lives and in the universe. Love is the kernel, which means 仁 is something we can plant like a seed, something that can grow; 仁 is warm

like the earth's heat; its beauty shines like a star. 仁 is the river of life that connects the beginning and the ending, and moves, sustains, changes everything in creative and loving order.

In this moment, after sharing the reflection on 仁, I would like to use this precious opportunity to speak with you and share my apology truthfully.

I am truly sorry for the hurried departure I am making. I have created unnecessary uncertainty, anxiety, even deep hurt and pain in my beloved people's hearts. I have caused deep hurt and broken trust among us. In particular, I did not consult about my four-days-early holiday departure with you. I was overwhelmed by my schedule, and I lacked a thoughtful approach. I did not take the right steps to maintain the wholeness and well-being of my, of our beloved community, Immanuel. I am deeply sorry for all you had to endure since my hasty announcement about my leaving. I am sorry for the heavy workload and emotional burden you had to take on, especially throughout the summer when celebrations, enjoyment and relaxation should bloom in our lives.

As the scriptures say, I understand that the emotions we go through - disappointment, sadness, anger, sorrow, even joy and forgiveness - arise because of love, and here at Immanuel, love and trust have been challenged, even broken at this very tender time. I am truly sorry. The river of life that flowed richly among us suffers now from the changes and transitions which I have caused. I humbly acknowledge that this trust, once lost, would be difficult to build again in the short time that remains to us.

At this tender and precious time, I looked at the Christian Bible as well as Confucius' Analects, especially chapter 28, that records about the teaching of 'ren' 仁. Confucius answers to his disciple Tsze-kung, "Now the person of perfect benevolence (ren), wishing to be established oneself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to fulfill their purpose oneself, they seek also to assist others to fulfill their purpose. To be able to judge/understand others by what is present in ourselves — this may be called the art of ren."

1 John encourages us, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us."

It echoes profoundly: We love because God first loved us.

May the love of God continue to sustain the life of Immanuel, as the river of life flows and nourishes everything it touches. May the richness of faith at Immanuel, its loving kindness, generosity, river of *ren*, heal the wounds of broken trust and sad farewell in all

our hearts in the next three weeks and thereafter. Bless and strengthen in your loving care the leadership at Immanuel as the church charts the way forward amidst uncertainty and disappointments. And may the Holy Spirit who grants us the courage to speak truthfully to each other cast out fear among us and help us hold on to our deep faith: God is love, and we love, because God first loved us. Amen.

Hymn: VU 296 *This is God's Wondrous World*

Offering: VU 541 *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.**

Prayers of the People

Creating God, we celebrate the life-giving bonds we have with all you have created. Especially in the heart of this splendid and beautiful summer season, we give you thanks for the care that we can give and receive as your creatures. We thank you for the land upon which we dwell, the land that nourishes body, mind and soul. We thank you for water, which fills and flows in river and brook and in the lakes. God of creation, help us to care for the water, keeping it pure and safe, and also the spiritual river that flows among us, in our beloved community. Help us to care for one another. As earth's creatures care for us, may we care for earth's creatures. You are revealed to us in the sights, sounds and smells of the creation which surrounds us and gives us life.

Our life, all life, depends upon you. Help us now, in our time of grief, to trust upon you anew. Bless us with the comfort of your presence as we gave and give thanks for the life of our dearest member and friend, Gene Antymis, and express our sorrow at his death. Let the warmth and strength of your love enfold the family, especially Jennifer, Megan and Dave, and give the family, the community, all those who shared life with Gene peace. We acknowledge that it is tremendous loss, as it is also tremendous love.

Creator God, Holy One,

Great Spirit of Mystery and Love, God of Covenant, we give thanks for remembered times when we together have shared the life of faith.

We thank you for the moments we have shared with each other at Immanuel, in worship, in learning, in play, in meals, in laughter, in tears, in prayer, and in outreach.

We pray that your Spirit continue to influence our Immanuel community of faith and its ministry and mission to serve others. Love others. Love ourselves. Love God.

Jesus said, This is the first commandment:

You shall love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

And the second is:

Love your neighbour as yourself.

Help us to hear you O Christ.

In the place and in the hearts among us in which the trust and the sense of covenant broken and hurt, grant us the courage to speak truthfully; for the minister to say sorry and express the apology sincerely, not only in words but in actions. For the congregation, for the members, the time to heal; and for us all, the courage to love our neighbour as ourselves. Let us abide in your love, with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength.

Be with us in our time of grief, disappointments, remembering and celebration.

We pray for the community of Immanuel. May the beloved congregation move forward confidently with renewed energy and vision in Christ.

Keep us one in your love, for your love for all is everlasting.

Hymn: VU 716 *My Life Flows On*

Commissioning and Benediction (*choral*): VU 964 *Go Now In Peace*

**Go now in peace, go now in peace.
May the love of God surround you
everywhere, everywhere you may go.**

Go forth from here.

Continue walking with Christ in love and service.

Take with you all we have shared today.

May our memories be springs of water when we are thirsty;

Rays of light when we are in the shadow of our sadness;

And reason for rejoicing always.

Remember dearly the Antymis family, embrace Gene in your eternal peace.

May God bless and keep us all.

Amen.