

Immanuel United Church  
August 21st, 2022

Prelude

Welcome (By Lynne Strome, on behalf of Immanuel United Church)

Hello friends, neighbours, visitors – welcome ALL! When the United Churches of north east Winnipeg were first called together by Cathy Welby and Luane Campbell of Grey Street several years ago they had a vision in the form of a question. “How in the coming years might our churches share in fellowship?” Many events and gatherings later we find ourselves enjoying the church-o-rama experience in each others sanctuaries! For me, and I dare say for many here today, it has been an exciting and satisfying journey around the neighbourhood. May we see, by show of hands, who from TBJIGGN is with us today?

1. Transcona Memorial United
2. Birds Hill United
3. John Black Memorial
4. Grey Street United
5. Gordon King Memorial
6. Immanuel United
7. North Kildonan United

We are very pleased to have you here with us today, - and, as we proclaim in The New Creed, - to celebrate God's presence among us and in our world. Next week Gordon King Memorial will host the wind-up Sunday of TBJIGGN church-o-rama.

For the September long weekend Sunday 4th Transcona and North Kildonan will welcome all comers whose church is not having their own service.

Introit: **Refrain** (*By Diane McKenty of Grey Street United  
for VU 291 All Things Bright and Beautiful*)

**All people here together,  
All friendships old and new.  
All who gather in God's name  
We welcome you here too.**

Call to Worship:

From the beginning of time, the universe has hummed with creative energy.

**The rhythm of love pulses in our veins and echoes in our heartbeat.**

With a breath, God began the whisper of life and it reverberates in our breathing.

**We live and breathe and have our being in the One who called us into life.**

Prayer:

**From the tops of our heads to the tips of our toes,  
we are your beloved children, O God.**

**You know our joys, disappointments, triumphs, and tragedies.**

**You know where we feel weak and where we feel strong.**

**We are your beloved children, O God.**

**You hold us. You help us. You comfort us.**

**You keep our hearts soft with your compassion,  
so that we may share your love in this world.**

**For this, we give you thanks, Amen.**

And we raise our voices to the Holy One with praise and gratitude.

Hymn: MV 145 *Draw the Circle Wide*

Scripture: John 6:1-21 Jesus feeds the multitude and walks on water.

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign

that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

The Choir Anthem: Down to the River to Pray

Reflection: 浩然之氣 (Ho Yeon Ji Chi) as the church

Welcome, Transcona Memorial, Birds Hill, John Black, Grey Street, Gordon King, and North Kildonan, Immanuel welcomes you all, wholeheartedly!

The gathering today for worship of our beloved seven United churches, echoes Jesus' community's first communion in today's Gospel reading. It was an electric moment for all who sat with Jesus on that day, experiencing the unexpected, unbelievable overflowing abundance of God's providence - inspired by a child's initiative, the small basket of 5 loaves and 2 fish, at an open "park", a grassy field, where there was no market or shops — no commerce at all. It was the wilderness. Those who gathered, under the heavens and on the earth, had nothing in common except for their desire to be close to Jesus. The Gospel of John tells us also that the gathering place was on the eastern side of the sea of Galilee, which was Gentile territory. The crowd came from varied places, different hometowns, cities, nations, different synagogues and temples. We model our gathering today on the event of this first, open-field communion on the eastern side of Galilee.

So... Imagine... Where we gather, where we are today, as if it is...

... A place you've never been to... The grassy land is wide and open; the scenery might be familiar but the people are new and diverse... You might hear different languages or accents and dialects here and there. It's the Gentiles' territory; you've crossed over an unspoken divide, and yet somehow, mysteriously, everything strange is peaceful and

positive until you become... hungry. Your stomach starts to growl... You're far from home, far from your bread, your larder – what will you do?

There is Jesus, Word-made-flesh... You do not know yet who he really is; but you have a strong impression that this person is very special and prophetic.

There is Jesus, Bread of Life – very special and prophetic, but you do not expect him to do something extraordinary with a mere offering of bread and fish from a child — not with five thousand people before him, hungry just like you.

Just like in our lives, when we cannot dare to expect the extraordinary, when we have nothing to give, not enough to nourish ourselves, or others.

Like the disciples in the second story in today's reading, we feel frightened — Jesus is walking on water! Can this be possible? Is it even allowed? The disciples in today's reading not only saw Jesus walking on the sea, Jesus was coming to the boat where they were sitting, terrified. Oh, that kind of precarious approach, even if it is Jesus, is not welcome. The day has been exhilarating, but they've used up all their energy. It was an exhausting trip, to be honest, even though, thank God, it ended with the happy, massive communion — seeing a miracle, being part of the miracle. But their bodies and brains need rest. The sea becomes rough; a strong wind is blowing. They see Jesus walking on the sea. What if Jesus, even unintentionally, capsizes the boat, drowning all! And it's evening! It's getting dark! They are going HOME after spending an extraordinary day in Gentile territory. Not the best timing to see another miracle, Jesus. No thank you.

Jesus says to his friends... "It is I; do not be afraid." V. 21, "Then, they [disciples] wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going." [Home].

No grand miracle. Just home. This time.

Today's Gospel story leads me to remember another foundational story in the Bible in which we, human beings, are terrified, vulnerable, and naked in spirit, exposed to deep shame or anger, the moment in which honesty, openness, forgiveness and acceptance call us. ... In which God calls God's beloveds. God's children. Eve and Adam at the garden of Eden. In that open, grassy Eden, Eve and Adam suddenly found themselves naked in body, and also in spirit. For the first time between these two, Eve and Adam see each other in vulnerability and shyness. They are naked! "How can this happen between us?"

Both quickly reach out their hands to a tree near them, not to pick delicious fruit and enjoy it as they used to, but to find something to hide their shame, anger, disconnection,

difference. In that moment God calls them. God “walks on” their garden and calls Eve and Adam, gently, in the wind, in God’s original sweet voice. Calming, peaceful, caring, comforting. God covers them with love, not judgement. God’s intention is to protect them; God’s blessings are for the growth of God’s beloved children and creatures, for their continuous flourishing even after the first covenant between them is broken, maybe, with the hope of mending what has been broken for a reparative, creative future.

Confucianism, a major Asian religious tradition like Buddhism, teaches the concept of “호연지기 浩然之氣” (The Korean way to pronounce this phrase is *Ho Yeon Ji Gi*. Gi is pronounced in the West and in Chinese as “Chi”, the word that means spirit/energy. In Chi, Spirit and Energy are inseparable, always one action, flow and movement together, surrounding, composing, changing the world’s creation and recreation. 浩然之氣 (Ho Yeon Ji Chi) is translated as “vast-flowing energy,” referring to the spiritual and physical state that nourishes, develops, and “revives one’s exhausted energy.” It’s the “vast spirit” and “great morale” we can experience when we climb a high mountain and reach its top, alone (or with a small group of friends), only you between the great heaven and the earth. it’s like the water that flows vigorously as if there’s nothing to prevent it (that means 浩然, literally meaning ‘flowing as such’). When we are terrified, like the disciples in the boat in a rough sea, our body naturally crouches, or becomes alert with muscles prepared to fight or flee. Nourishing/experiencing 浩然之氣 (Ho Yeon Ji Chi) is opposite to that ‘fight or flight’ response, analogous to extending your arms and legs in a giant “X”: hands touching the sky, feet standing on the ground, fully connected. The energy opens up with your open body. It becomes vast, it becomes flowing, it becomes great, reviving our exhausted energy. Just like Jesus extends his arms up and breaks the bread in that open, grassy wilderness, where there’s nothing but the community of disciples, neighbours, ourselves, between the vast flowing heaven and earth. We are nourished. We are enlivened. We are regenerated, because Jesus is our 浩然之氣 vast flowing energy (Ho Yeon Ji Chi), Living Bread. Living Water.

Now we gather, in joy and giving thanks, at the building of Immanuel United Church, but imagine with me as if God is showing us the 3D architectural rendering. God gently holds up the building and takes it away from/above us, and now, between the great heaven and earth we are ourselves, in our neighbourhood, like Eves and Adams, like the first disciples of Jesus at the wilderness: finding ourselves open, vulnerable, encouraged, empowered, confident and beloved. Then God invites us to hold each one’s arms, by extending our own. Our own feet touch our friends’, and we don’t mind. (No need to say Canadian sorry.) Actually, we will welcome that touch, that connection. We are not alone. We have companions to walk a long journey together. The connection of the people of 浩然之氣 (Ho Yeon Ji Chi) is the church. Not the names of the churches.

Not the buildings of the churches. This communion echoes the miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. In our intermingled congregations, we know some folks, but we do not know all. We might hear different languages, accents or dialects, and theologies, here and there. We've crossed over unspoken divides, boundaries, and even rules, but that's fine! Everything is peaceful, positively strange, with time to become comfortable and enjoy this extended friendship in God, Christ-centered fellowship, ... and after some exhilarating exhaustion, you start to feel hungry. Your stomach grows! The communion is the church. The 浩然之氣 vast flowing energy (Ho Yeon Ji Chi), only Adams and Eves can be making, with courage, truth, joy and welcome, is the church. As the big Xes, from the tips of our toes to the tops of our heads — connected to each other's X — together creating the Cosmic Christ, the church can be extended as big as the cosmos.

So, beloved mingled friends, mingled churches, extend your 浩然之氣 (Ho Yeon Ji Chi) and sing a song of faith as if we all are now sharing a mountain-top experience on Golspie Street! There are no roadblocks between Heaven and Earth; the table of Jesus, the table of welcome, truly revives our exhausted energy. Even if the covenants between humans may be broken and we end up hurting, wounded, changing, the steadfast love of God, God's holy covenant with each one of us, the Creator's duet with us, with everyone of us, with everyone of you, never, never changes. We live in God's world. Let us praise God who is present amongst us as Living Bread, Living Water and calls us in the wind, and protects us and blesses each one of God's Eves and Adams.

Hymn: VU 291 *All Things Bright and Beautiful*

Refrain:

**All people here together,  
all friendships old and new.  
All who gather in God's name  
we welcome you here too.**

v 3:

**The cold wind in the winter,  
the pleasant summer sun,  
the ripe fruits in the garden:  
God made them every one.**

New verse:

**To worship with your neighbour,  
to pray, rejoice and sing.  
We all make up God's family  
so let our voices ring.**

v 5:

**God gave us eyes to see them,  
and lips that we might tell  
how great is God our maker,  
who has made all things well.**

Refrain:

**All people here together,  
all friendships old and new.  
All who gather in God's name  
we welcome you here too.**

Offering:

Video: Holy Affirming Kisses

VU 510 *We Have This Ministry* (verse 2)

Offering Prayer:

As we open our hearts to you, O God, in love, we present these offerings.  
**We present also the act of love we have shared and received:  
kind words, time spent with those in need of company,  
food given in love, and care for others.  
Receive these gifts and leave their mark on our hearts  
so we may become ever more generous day by day. Amen.**

Prayers of the People

Grateful for your loving action, O God, we cannot keep from singing.  
Creating and seeking relationship, in awe and trust, we witness to Holy Mystery,  
You, Wholly Love.

Hymn: VU 509 *I, The Lord of Sea and Sky* (Here I am, Lord)

Commissioning and Benediction:

**God, who was in the beginning, is in you even now.  
Go from here in the blessing of the Holy Spirit.  
Go from here in fullness of God's love.  
Go from here in the footsteps of Jesus, Love Incarnate,**

**to love and to serve others,  
and may the light of love illumine your path.**

Extrait: **New verse** (*By Diane McKenty of Grey Street United  
for VU 291 All Things Bright and Beautiful*)

**To worship with your neighbor,  
To pray, rejoice and sing.  
We all make up God's family  
So let our voices ring.**

**Amen**